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MEDIA RELEASE

NSSRN calls for opposition to newly arrived migrants bill

The National Social Security Rights Network (NSSRN) calls on the Labor Opposition, the Australian Greens and cross-bench Senators to oppose a bill which extends waiting periods for newly arrived migrants accessing income support payments, particularly the payments intended to provide a safety net for those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

The bill extends waiting periods for accessing payments including Special Benefit, which is intended as a payment of last resort, and Family Tax Benefit which assists families with children. The waiting period for Newstart Allowance for newly arrived migrants seeking employment is being extended from two to four years.

“The extension of waiting periods will further disadvantage migrants, increasing the inequality between them and the rest of the community”, said Leanne Ho, Executive Officer of the NSSRN, the peak body for social security law, policy and administration.

“Special Benefit, the payment for people in financial hardship who have exhausted all other avenues of support, should be available to all residents to prevent individuals or communities falling into desperate poverty. In our experience, it is difficult for people to satisfy the criteria that there has been ‘a substantial change in circumstances’ required to be exempt from the waiting period, so the effect of extending the period will be to remove this safety net for many vulnerable people who unexpectedly fall on hard times once they arrive in Australia”, said Ho.

“Any savings resulting from the introduction of these measures will be lost in the cost to charitable and community organisations or other government-funded services of dealing with the increased poverty and social problems through provision of emergency relief including food, housing, and healthcare. We see people who are already subject to a long waiting period who want to make a meaningful contribution to their new community, but are living in garages and cannot access the support needed to get on their feet.”

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The NSSRN is the peak community organisation in the area of income support law, policy and administration, with member community legal centres across Australia which provide free and independent legal assistance to people experiencing issues with social security and family assistance payments.