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PROOF

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**Social Services Legislation
Amendment (No. 2) Bill 2015**

Second Reading

SPEECH

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SPEECH

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Speaker Fawcett, Sen David	Question No.

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (20:35): I also rise to make some comments on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (No. 2) Bill 2015. I will speak briefly about the outline of the bill, and then I would like to make a few comments based on my time in the other place when I was the local member for one of the areas that is impacted by this legislation.

The bill has two large sections. One is the streamline income management section—that is schedule 1 to the bill—which amends the social security law to streamline the current income management program under a two-year continuation. So the income management, the BasicsCard, will continue for an additional two years to support the existing income management participants. The streamlining provisions of this bill will enable a more effective operation of the income management program. In particular, the bill provides for the abolition of certain incentive payments relating to income management, amends the operation of the vulnerable measure of income management and makes minor streamlining amendments to remove ambiguities and improve the program's effectiveness.

The second area is around schedules 2 and 3, which are aged-care measures. They make amendments to reflect measures regarding aged care which were included in the 2014-15 Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook announcement. The first of these measures is to cease payment from 1 July 2015 of a residential care subsidy to aged-care providers for holding a place for up to seven days prior to a recipient entering care. The second is to abolish the Aged Care Planning Advisory Committee as part of the smaller government initiative. I will come back to aged care in a minute.

I would like to talk firstly about the City of Playford, which I had the privilege of representing when I was in the other place. For many years I had worked at the RAAF base at Edinburgh as a test pilot and eventually as the commanding officer of the aircraft research and development unit, so I had flown over this area known as the Peachey Belt within the City of Playford for many years without interacting all that much with the community. But when I put my hand up to become the member for Wakefield, I resigned from the military and I spent many months as an unpaid candidate doorknocking and getting to know the community in that area. People like Shaun Barby from the Peachey Belt Residents Association, the mayor—Marilyn Baker at the time and later Martin Lindsell—and a range of people embraced the fact that I was taking an interest in this community.

Whilst it has had a pretty poor reputation at various times and the socioeconomic figures are next to Redfern's in terms of its being an area of disadvantage, there was actually a strong sense of community within the Peachey Belt area, and I grew to appreciate and work closely with many people who lived in that area and who had a great aspiration to see the area develop and improve. This included residents and people in organisations such as Anglicare, UnitingCare and others who ran programs such as food banks and carers associations in the Peachey Belt area. There was a range of people who wanted to make life better, particularly teachers at schools such as Swallowcliffe who worked with young people, young Australians, who came from some very disadvantaged backgrounds. It really opened my eyes to the needs as well as the strengths of a particular community within Australia.

What really struck me, though, was the fact that there were parts of the community who were intergenerationally unemployed, and we are talking people who are second, third and in some cases even fourth generation unemployed. But some young people amazed me, and I think of one young man in particular who lived in Munno Para in the eastern part of that area and went to Gawler High School. Despite having quite a dysfunctional home life and couch surfing for much of his time, he ended up achieving fantastic results in year 11 and year 12 and went on with quite an artistic flair to study music at the Elder Conservatorium of Music in Adelaide. That just really highlights the fact that you cannot put people in boxes. You cannot say that because you come from this area or this is your background that this will limit what you can achieve.

What I also saw was people who had found that living on welfare was all that they aspired to. I came across young people who literally sought to be on a disability support pension. I had young men of 17 or 18 come into my electorate office at the Munno Para shopping centre and complain because they had not been approved to go onto a disability support pension at that age. As I quizzed them and talked to them it became apparent that many of them were capable of achieving far more than they believed they could. As you traced back you could look at the dysfunction that was often present in the family. Sometimes that was due to substance abuse, whether that be alcohol or drugs. Sometimes it was due to dependence on things like pokies, which meant that there was very little money in the family or support for education.

I remember speaking to the police sergeant at the Elizabeth police station once who told me of a young man who had come into the police station and had asked to be escorted home to collect his belongings. The policeman initially told him to move on his way, but this young man persisted. It turned out that he was literally at some risk of violence from his father because this young man had actually got a job, and that was such an undermining of the world view that had been built by his father and his grandfather regarding what they were owed and what they were capable or not capable of doing. This young man had broken the mould to the point that he was at risk of violence.

I raise these points to highlight that whilst 17 per cent of people are unemployed in the Playford area at any given time—the figures vary from year to year—and youth unemployment is significantly higher and around eight per cent of people are long-term unemployed there, depending on the period you look at, the fact is that there are young people who are being impacted by the inability or unwillingness of their parents to use the income that they have to provide for the education, the healthy living and just the basic clothing, diet or activities of young people. This has a significant impact on their willingness, their self-confidence, their ability to take up opportunities that are provided to them.

In 2007, as the member for Wakefield at the time and as the chair of the government's Family and Community Affairs Committee under Minister Brough, I looked at this. The committee looked at the number of services that were being provided. One of the challenges that kept being thrown up to us by providers and even by teachers at schools was the question of: given the amount of resources that we are putting into these areas, why is the dysfunction continuing and why are we not seeing sustainable turnarounds and changes in those communities? One of the things that Minister Brough approved was an audit, which was conducted by Anglicare, if my recollection is correct. They looked to do an audit of the whole area to understand exactly what was being provided, on what basis it was being provided and what outcomes this support was having.

I recall that one of the options that were discussed at the time was income management. You may recall that in 2007 income management was brought in as part of the federal government's Northern Territory Emergency Response. Part of the legislation allowed the option to extend this to areas other than the Northern Territory. When we first started talking about that for some of these communities within Playford, I remember copping a fair shellacking in the media. My political opponent at the time was quite negative about it, but I was satisfied that we were on the right track when I was called by some teachers at one of the local primary schools, who asked to meet with me. I would have to say that they were not naturally supporters of the conservative side of politics, so I went to meet them anticipating that perhaps I would get a bit of a chest-poking. But they were very clear that they saw themselves as being at the coalface of this issue of disadvantage and dysfunction.

These teachers were the ones dealing with young people in grades 1 and 2 who were coming to school having not had breakfast, possibly not even having had dinner the night before—kids who were worse than latchkey children, who were really fending for themselves, who found it hard to concentrate at school because of the lack of nutrition, who found that they were always behind the eight ball because mum—and generally it was only mum, and possibly a stepdad or partner—were down at the pub or out playing pokies. They did not have that support to help them read, and if you look at the early years of learning, during those years that are really crucial to imbue in children an understanding of language, concepts, shapes, colours and names—the things that are the basic building blocks if you want to get ahead in life—often support was not being provided because the parents were spending their time and money on other pursuits. These teachers were saying, 'We support these measures. We live and work at the coalface with these people. We support a change that will make a difference for these children.' That sticks in my mind as I think about income management and the discussions that are occurring now in other areas of South Australia, such as Ceduna, and in areas of Indigenous disadvantage around the country. The fact is that there are some people in our community who, through choice or circumstance or

through a lack of training or capacity on their own part—perhaps poor parenting that they have received—lack the will or competence to manage their income.

Whilst income management alone is an effective tool, there are other programs we need to wrap around people. In South Australia I particularly look at groups like Service to Youth Council, who have had a long-term investment in areas such as the Playford City Council, in Elizabeth, and in the Peachey Belt, working with young people to help them overcome many of these areas of disadvantage. Unlike many government programs, which tend to be very stovepiped, holistic approaches are really the only way to help people take a hand up, as opposed to living on a continual hand-out. Whilst income management tries to help people, both to have the money to spend on their children and to avoid them spending it on things like alcohol and gambling, we also need to be wrapping the services around these young people to make up for the gaps in some of the life skills that they have not picked up from their parents.

Service to Youth, in particular, does a great job of providing a holistic model of caring for these young people in South Australia. The results are very clearly shown in the outcomes that they achieve in terms of the number who enter their programs who then go on to secure work and are still in work 12 months later. Their model is very much wrapped around providing care for the person in terms of housing. They have even used their own discretionary funds to create a number of what they call HYPAs—Helping Young People to Achieve—because they recognise that if you are couch surfing or have nowhere permanent to live, or if you are a young person from a country area seeking to do an apprenticeship in the city but you have nowhere affordable to live and you are trying to drive home each night or you are living in your car, that is not a way to sustain education and meaningful work outcomes.

They recognise that there are life skills that many of these young people lack because their parents to date have not had income management and have not had the encouragement to invest in their children. They are not work ready. Some of their programs start off with just getting them consistently out of bed on time and turning up to a work place, and starting to shape their understanding and expectation of what it is that an employer might want them to do and the fact that an employer has the right—in fact the obligation—to instruct them, to tell them how to work to keep them safe, and that there is a realistic expectation that they will put in a good day's work to get a good day's return. Coupled with education and, essentially, pastoral care or social work support, we find that many of these young people have good outcomes.

That is great, and I thoroughly commend Service to Youth Council for the work that they do, but surely we should be trying to put systems in place where the family unit, the biological parents of the child, are the ones who have the interest and resources to invest in these kids to give them the life skills that they need to get that start in education and to make that transition from education to work. If the things that cause the dysfunction, the lack of interest and the lack of capacity are so often tied to misuse of money which has come from the taxpayer and is spent on things like alcohol or gambling, then I am 100 per cent behind the measures around income management, coupled with—as I say—things to help people in terms of budgeting and working towards the an independent point where they can manage those funds in their own right.

The other area I will just quickly touch on is the aged care reforms. I mentioned briefly what the outcomes are here. The other comment I would just make on aged care, having held a round of consultations last week with the Assistant Minister for Health and talking with people in rural areas of South Australia, is that the My Aged Care website—which is up; I recognise that we try to streamline information and make it accessible to people—does need to be navigable by the average man in the street. Having looked at it and tried to go through it myself, I believe it is one area where we need to be constantly seeking feedback from users to make sure that things like the My Aged Care website is workable so that people who are seeking residential care and the various payments to go along with it have all the information they need in a useful manner.

One of my strong contentions is that, whilst there are savings to be had by centralising programs and having it all done out of one office, there are also local differences that we see—whether we are talking in the health care area or whether we talking about the aged care area. It is important that, particularly where we have a function that constitutionally has been the responsibility of the federal government, we recognise that there are local inputs that would be required even in something as basic as a national website. While it might appear logical to somebody sitting on the east coast, when someone in Gawler in South Australia looks for a service provider and when something is on the other side of the city, it is clearly not the service that they are going to need. That

geographic split may not be known by somebody sitting on the east coast. There are things that we can still be doing to make those systems more effective.

I welcome the measures in the bill and the government amendments to the bill. I particularly welcome the two-year continuation of the income management program, because I have seen firsthand the impacts on young people in Australia when their caregivers—often a mum, often a stepdad or a partner—use the benefits that are provided to them by the taxpayer on things like alcohol and gambling to the great detriment of young people. Anything we can do to improve the circumstances, basic education and care of those young people, every member of this Senate should be supporting it.