



National Campaign Headquarters

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Jane Stanley
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Dear Jane

Council of Single Mothers and their Children - Victoria

1. Poverty

The Prime Minister has announced that if re-elected, the Gillard Labor will increase the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit A for teenagers aged 16 to 18 to \$208 a fortnight – an increase of more than \$150 a fortnight.

Single income families may also become eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part B as a result of these changes if their child moves from Youth Allowance onto Family Tax Benefit Part A. This will further increase the amount of total additional assistance they may receive.

Under this initiative, families will also gain Rent Assistance for their 16 to 18 year olds living at home. This will provide an incentive for teenagers to continue living in the family home. Around 30,000 families will benefit from additional Rent Assistance.

If re-elected, Federal Labor will also expand the Education Tax Refund scheme so that school uniforms can be included in claims, giving families up to \$779 per child each year to help with the costs of sending kids to school.

This builds on action already taken in Federal Labor's first term including:

- Getting rid of *WorkChoices*.
- Changes to the participation requirements for income support for parents to provide more flexibility.

- A \$4.9 billion investment in employment services through Job Services Australia so that everyone who needs help to get a job will get it – with more help going to those who are more disadvantaged.

2. Child support

If re-elected, Federal Labor will strengthen the compliance regime on the use of default income in child support assessments. A new, more accurate, default income arrangement will be introduced that uses a parent's previous taxable income instead of a lower default income in cases where they have not lodged a tax return.

Under Federal Labor, the Child Support Agency launched a new early intervention program which has contacted more than 35,000 defaulting parents since its commencement in August 2009 to come to an agreed repayment arrangement. The program takes into account parents' individual circumstances and provides them with options including referrals for financial advice.

Further, under Federal Labor, the Child Support Agency has introduced optical surveillance to ensure parents meet their obligations. Following an evaluation of a 12-month trial, in June 2009, Federal Labor decided that covert optical surveillance would permanently form part of the Child Support Agency's toolkit for investigating serious cases of child support non compliance and fraud.

3. Family Law

Federal Labor released key reports into the Australia family law system in January 2010.

The Gillard Labor Government will carefully consider the findings and recommendations of the reports before outlining its response but is committed to further improve the family law system so that separated families can access the help they need to sort out their parenting arrangements, and in the best interests of the child.

The Gillard Labor Government is currently considering legislative amendments to improve the family law system's handling of violence cases, whilst maintaining Federal Labor's commitment to the concept of shared parental responsibility and shared care where it is safe and appropriate.

The Gillard Labor Government is already progressing initiatives to address some of the concerns raised in the reports, including a training package for family law system professionals and a pilot program of legally assisted family dispute resolution for family violence cases.

Further, the Gillard Labor Government is working with State and Territory Attorneys-General on developing a national register of domestic violence orders. It has also provided the Australian Law Reform Commission with references to inquire into family violence, focusing on the interaction of Commonwealth and State laws regarding domestic violence and sexual assault, and on how a range of Commonwealth laws (including laws on child support and family assistance, immigration, employment, social security and superannuation) support victims of family violence.

4. Affordable Housing

The Gillard Labor Government understands that there is not enough affordable housing in Australia.

After over a decade of total neglect of housing, the Gillard Labor Government has committed nearly \$20 billion to housing programs to build more affordable homes for Australian families including:

- 76 local projects funded under the Housing Affordability Fund - delivering savings to around 14,000 home buyers in new developments. 380,000 more households will benefit from planning and development reform that has brought forward new lots and made development regulation more efficient.
- 80,000 more affordable rental homes across Australia particularly for low and moderate income earners.
- Funding to build over 21,000 new social housing homes. We have also helped to repair more than 70,000 existing dwellings – 10,000 of which would have become unfit for use as housing had repairs not occurred.
- The First Home Owners Boost which helped more than 250,000 people into their first home during the Global Financial Crisis.

5. Social Inclusion

The Gillard Labor Government values the contribution of all families, and understands the particular pressures that single parent families face.

The reforms will target support to vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians, and ensure that welfare payments are first and foremost spent in the best interest of children and families. The Gillard Labor Government's income management policy is intended to be beneficial and provide support for families, vulnerable individuals and particularly children.

Kind Regards
ALP Information Services