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To the Social Services and Community Select Committee,

About us

Aviva is a family and sexual violence charity established over 50 years ago. Our vision is a violence-free Aotearoa. Until then, we work to support people to overcome its effects and make families and communities safer.

With over five decades of experience, we know that, while family and sexual violence can happen to anybody, economic insecurity plays a major role in worsening outcomes for those who experience it.

For this reason, we must strongly oppose this bill.

The Bill appears to assume that that people on benefits are so because they want to be, or because of a lack of motivation. In our experience, people are very reluctant to ask for and accept help. Many people we support did not expect to find themselves in this situation; they have never use 'the system' before, and as such so are already disadvantaged in knowing how to access support.

Further, sanctions are not an effective motivator. When someone's energy is focused entirely on survival day-to-day, it is impossible for them to have the energy, self-worth and ability to think dynamically. These things are vital for anyone trying to enter, or re-enter work.

As a non-profit, we are well used to operating on a tight budget and we therefore appreciate the need to increase revenue and reduce costs in times of economic downturn. However, this is not the way to do it.

Aviva, like many other organisations operating in the same space, does not just "help" people. We save lives, and we believe all people are worth saving. Poverty kills. Austerity measures kill. The policies in this bill can, and will, kill.

In family violence mahi, our primary aim, above all else, is to stop people being harmed by the person using violence. Economic hardship, housing and food insecurity massively increases the risk to children and families. They are already at highest risk when attempting to leave for safety. Their priority is staying alive (and keeping Tamariki safe). With Family Court, property disputes and post-separation abuse, this can take years. Some can stay in work, or find work within six months, but this is not a realistic expectation of the majority for people working through trauma, supporting Tamariki through trauma, potentially uprooting, caring for small children, and entering or re-entering the workforce. Measures such as those proposed in this bill make it so much harder to leave an unsafe home, that it will act as a deterrent.

In working with people who have experienced sexual violence, our primary aim in safety planning is to stop the person harming themselves. The destabilising and violent experience of sexual harm, and subsequent trauma response, can make it impossible for the person to work, or work in the field they're used to. Further, should their case go through the criminal justice system, this could drag on for months or even years. Forcing them into unsuitable work and/or the disempowering process of re-applying for jobseeker support

compounds their trauma and lack of self-worth. Furthermore, having an approved ACC Sensitive Claim typically means that private income protection/health/trauma insurers will not insure a person. This further punishes them for something that was never their fault.

To address the Bill's four key points:

- **The introduction of money management sanctions** puts people at risk of homelessness. While we acknowledge that *some* people need support with money management, this is not the way to do it. The Bill suggests placing 50% of a person's benefit on a card which can only be used in certain stores. This does not take into account that over 50% of many people's income goes on housing. Being homeless makes it harder to get a job.
- **Community work experience**, in forcing people into unpaid labour, is a form of economic abuse (which many of our clients have already experienced). Furthermore, as a community organisation who may "benefit" from such a scheme this would not work for us. With all the existing cuts to the sector, we do not have the capacity for being responsible for more interns. This is essentially making us do unpaid labour as well.
- **Extending the obligation failure sanction** worsens an already harmful policy. Obligation failure sanctions mimic the pattern of interpersonal abuse; they impose extreme punishment for small infractions (such as missing a phone call). This policy puts children at risk, by forcing parents (often solo) to take work that may take them away from their children. Not everyone has reliable, safe, free childcare.
- **Making people, including those on disability support**, to constantly prove they "still" have health issues is not only an unnecessary strain on resources but it places people who are already vulnerable at higher risk. If they fail to seem "unwell enough", that they lose their benefits, they are forced into poverty. It also can force their loved ones into care roles, meaning that they may have to leave work.

There are countless reasons people need benefits. To name but a few:

- Job loss because of public sector cuts (which those proposing this bill made);
- Leaving an abusive relationship in which they were prevented from working; or their work was linked to their partner; or they are or now unable to work due to health or need to care for their children;
- Child care is unaffordable;
- Traumatic events have made it harder for them for "function" in a workplace;

It is not a choice. Life simply, in some way, throws them a curve ball such as unexpected death, which affects those left behind's persons quality of life, health, housing, financial affairs, everything.

Our recommendation is that this bill be rejected.

We recommend that, when making any policy, the Government starts from a place of ensuring all Kiwis' absolute human rights are met. This means that everyone can afford safe housing, power and food and access to medical supports. Nobody can begin to improve their situation if they are struggling just to survive.