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AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES DESERVE A FAIR GO – AND AN INDEPENDENT WELFARE UMPIRE

Catholic Social Services Australia has welcomed Cathy McGowan's introduction of a private member's bill establishing a new Social Security Commission, arguing such an entity could help address societal inequality.

CSSA deputy CEO Joe Zabar said: "At a time when household budgets are under significant pressure, this Commission would provide independent advice on the minimum levels for social security payments that would enable more Australians to live with dignity.

"The Consumer Price Index increased by 2.1 per cent in the year to June 2018 and the costs for housing, petrol, health and education increased by more," Mr Zabar explained.

"While income tax cuts will provide some relief, there is little doubt that Australian households remain uneasy about their future financial security."

Mr Zabar said Australia has "a social and economic safety net that has been used by successive governments as a budget-balancing expenditure item".

"All the while, many pensioners, families and those on Newstart are slipping further into debt and are being forced to ration food or energy use and shelving medical and dental visits to balance the family budgets," he said.

A [Social Policy Research Centre study](#) on the minimum income necessary for healthy living found that a couple with two children on welfare was more than \$126 below the budget standard.

"We need to restore integrity to our social safety net," Mr Zabar said.

"If it is good enough to have an independent body to set the remuneration for our federal politicians and their senior officials, surely an independent body to review and make recommendations on the level of welfare payments needed to allow people to live with dignity makes good policy sense."

Catholic Social Services Australia supports the legislation introduced in federal Parliament today by Ms McGowan as an important step in the right direction.