

MEDIA RELEASE

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Migration Amendment Bills a concern for justice and human dignity

Catholic Social Services Victoria members support many people who have been detained in our immigration detention system, many who are refugees, and many who are currently seeking asylum. They support them in material aid and assistance, in free healthcare, and in provision of housing. In addition, these organisations and many individuals who are seeking asylum or are refugees are supported further by Catholic Parishes, Healthcare organisations, Dioceses and Religious Congregations from across the Catholic community in Australia.

CSSV, along with a number of our member organisations and our colleagues at the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) and the Refugee Council are deeply concerned about the implications of the Migration Amendment Bills passed last week by the Senate.

The Government has failed to properly listen to the advice, concerns and reasons of the social services and refugee services sector and instead chose to rush consultation. The following Catholic organisations that managed to be involved in the very quick response time required of the Senate Committee Inquiry rejected the proposed amendments in their entirety:

- National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society
- The Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney's Office of Justice and Peace
- Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
- Edmund Rice Centre
- Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
- Jesuit Social Services

While we do not yet know the full impact of this new legislation, there are many measures in these bills that could have significant implications for the wellbeing of some of the most made-vulnerable people in our country. This includes the authority for the Government to:

- Remove a refugee's protection finding to remove them from Australia.
- Deny people in immigration detention mobile phone connection – which is so important to relationships and services.
- Pay undisclosed third countries to warehouse non-citizens.
- Target some individuals who were refused a visa under the unjust 'fast track' process.
- Imprison people who will not return to countries where they fear for their lives.
- Create travel bans for citizens of certain countries.
- Permanently and forcefully separate more families.

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These implications undermine core elements of what humans need for wellbeing — stability, certainty and connection. Permanent protection is core to a hope-filled future for many who have been forced to leave their home countries in search of protection.

CSSV notes that the Labor Party previously opposed many of the measures in these bills when they were in opposition. They also abandoned the Entry Ban and Forced Removal Bill earlier this year due to outcry over its measures. Despite Labor's backflip, these measures remain unjust and not a direction Australia should be headed.

CSSV Executive Director Joshua Lourensz says, "Our members know the harm that has been done to people in immigration detention settings and to those in the community because they are picking up the pieces of inhumane and unthoughtful immigration policies and processes. Australia can do better."

"Social service and community organisations are here to do so much more than pick up the pieces and advocate against bad immigration policy – we would prefer our energy be put to social cohesion and welcome. Unfortunately, the passing of these amendments could place more people deeper into insecurity, isolation and destitution, and services will have to continue to keep trying to fill the gaps."

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