



PSA Submission on the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill

16 March 2018

PSA submission to the Social Services and Community Select Committee on the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill

About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 64,000 members. We are a democratic organisation representing members in the public service, the wider state sector (the district health boards, crown research institutes and other crown entities), state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services and community sectors.

The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913. People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

The PSA is an affiliate of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU) and supports the submission of the CTU on this bill.

This includes members working at Superu, the Social Investment Agency, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Development – all agencies which are affected to varying degrees by this bill.

PSA comments and recommendations

The Explanatory Note states:

*The main purpose of this Bill is to repeal the Families Commission Act 2003 and to disestablish the Families Commission (the **Commission**), in order to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the provision of social science research and advocacy for the interests of families generally.*

Our understanding is that arrangements are in place to achieve only the first part of this purpose.

Greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the provision of social science research

The Families Commission or in its current incarnation, Superu has produced high quality analysis, research and guidance that is valued by the social services sector. It has provided leadership and supported growth of capability in evaluation both within government and across the sector. It is important for the achievement of the purpose of the Bill that all of these functions are taken up by the different organisations to which Superu functions and funding are being distributed.

We understand that at this stage the only function of Superu that will be taken by the Social Investment Agency is The Hub¹. The research, reports and guidance that Superu has produced, and which are highly valued by non-governmental organisations and communities, should continue to be made available. We note, for example, that it appears that there is no planned home for the “What Works” research syntheses that Superu have produced and which are valued by the sector. We recommend that the Committee ask officials to provide advice on which agency will take on responsibility for continuing to produce these useful outputs.

The Social Investment Agency can and should become a bridge between government agencies and NGOs and communities. In our view it makes sense that the Social Investment Agency continues to grow and develop its use of qualitative research methods alongside its expertise in data analysis. In our view, to truly “achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the provision of social science research” the Social Investment Agency needs to have a mandate to take a broader view of what is research and evidence. To be most effective it will need to evolve to be a system-wide function working actively with the people, (whether they are public servants or working elsewhere in the

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<http://superu.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Superu%20BIM%20to%20Min%20for%20Social%20Development%2026%20Oct%202017%20PUBLIC.pdf>

sector), who are working with citizens at the coal face of programme and service delivery, and building the capability of the sector to gather good data for evaluation.

We recommend that the Committee seek an assurance from the Minister that this more integrated approach will formally become part of the Social Investment Agency's mandate, and also that the Agency will take on Superu's function of building the capability of NGOs within the sector.

Greater effectiveness and efficiencies in advocacy for the interests of families generally

The Bill also aims to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies in "advocacy for the interests of families generally". However, it is not clear to us that this can be achieved as Superu's function of acting as an advocate in policy for families and whānau is not being allocated to any other agency.

Child poverty is one of the greatest current policy challenges and there is a growing focus on child-centred policy. Children do not live in isolation from their families and whanau - poor children live in poor families. If child poverty is to be addressed then it is important that advocacy for families and whanau continues to have a focus within the policy process.

We recommend that the Committee ask officials to provide advice on how the Bill will achieve its aim of enabling greater effectiveness and efficiencies in advocacy for the interest of families and in particular whether the Children's Commissioner would already be well positioned to formally take on this function, along with the funding needed to resource this. Our understanding is that MSD will receive some residual funding following the disestablishment of Superu and if possible, this funding should be tagged to support continuation of the advocacy function.

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