

13 March 2026

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted by upload

Inquiry into the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Technical Changes No. 1) Bill 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Technical Changes No. 1) Bill 2026.

Relationships Australia supports amendments that clarify the lawful operation of the child support system, and which ensure that it operates, in practice, as Parliament intended. We acknowledge work underway across Government to act on the findings and recommendations of the Commonwealth Ombudsman in its 2025 reports on weaponisation of child support and its 2026 report of its investigation into the actions of Services Australia and the Department of Social Services in operationalising the social security law. We have welcomed opportunities afforded to us by DSS and Services Australia to participate in this work.

Need for system transformation to counter systems abuse

We support passage of the Bill in its current form. However, we do share some of the concerns expressed by Parliamentarians. In particular, we agree with the Member for Warringah, Zali Steggall MP, that more fundamental transformations are urgently needed, to more effectively deter, counter and remediate systems abuse and financial abuse enabled by the child support system under current legislative settings. Such transformations will necessarily involve close collaboration with the Australian Taxation Office, to more proactively and consistently ensure that child support payers comply with their obligations to lodge assessments within statutory timeframes.

Urgent payments

The capacity to provide advances of between \$20-200 of accrued entitlements, to enable a child support payee to cope with unforeseen and exceptional circumstances is critically necessary, and we welcome the insertion of section 43A to provide a clear legislative basis for the Secretary to do so. We also welcome the Government's intention to provide for personalised supports for payees who are making frequent applications for urgent payments, to ensure that they are not falling into entrenched disadvantage for want of appropriate therapeutic or financial support.

Successful and sustainable operationalisation of section 43A requires that personalised supports be offered in a timely way, that balances the desirability of preventing entrenched disadvantage with payees' rights to privacy. The preconditions for this occurring are:

- adequate resourcing, in terms of staff time and training, of Services Australia officers to enable them to identify appropriate, culturally sensitive supports, that are tailored to each individual, and
- adequate resourcing for services on the referral pathways – the materials accompanying the Bill refer specifically to financial counselling and social work supports. Relationships Australia is aware that financial counsellors across Australia are hard pressed to meet current demand (and current inflationary pressures will only exacerbate this situation). Further, the community and health services sector generally is equally facing overwhelm. It is unhelpful when the successful implementation of legislation relies on referral pathways which are chronically under-resourced to provide the kinds and intensity of support promised during the passage of legislation.

We agree with the Member for Moncrieff, Angie Bell MP, that personalised supports must be 'accessible, timely and available'.

In respect of timeliness, we have some concerns that the threshold for triggering the obligation on applicants for urgent payments to engage with Services Australia may be too high, and allow for an applicant to already have entrenched themselves in a cycle of disadvantage.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Bill. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of these comments further, please do not hesitate to contact me at ntebbey@relationships.org.au / 0422 415 987, or Dr Susan F Cochrane, our National Policy Manager, at scochrane@relationships.org.au / 0477 778 659.

Kind regards



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