

17 May 2018

**Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Prime Minister  
New Zealand Labour Party  
Freepost PO Box 18 888  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160 New Zealand**

Sent via email: [jacinda.ardern@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:jacinda.ardern@parliament.govt.nz)

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned, are a group of community organisations working to support young people in Australia.

**We write regarding the uniquely harsh conditions facing young New Zealanders experiencing homelessness in Australia.**

We acknowledge and congratulate you on your Government's progressive and compassionate stance on Trans-Tasman issues so far. Our concern relates to a matter which has garnered little attention in either New Zealand or Australia but continues to be a tragedy for a number of New Zealand citizens.

WEstjustice has worked with a number of young New Zealanders aged 15 to 18 years who arrived in Australia after 26 February 2001 and are therefore not entitled to income support from the Australian Government.

These young people are unable to live at home due to family violence and breakdown and as a result became homeless. Many have spent their entire lives in Australia or come to Australia as very young children and have no connections to New Zealand or the Pacific Islands.

The inability to access Australian income support means these young people do not have a 'safety net', and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The consequences, especially for young women and girls, are shocking.

This issue was detailed extensively in WEstjustice's 'Couch Surfing Limbo' research report, which was launched by Victoria's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Liana Buchanan in November 2017. We enclose a copy of this report for your reference.

We acknowledge that your government supports Australian young people living in New Zealand who are homeless, via the provision of the Youth Payment. Unfortunately, this generosity is not reciprocated.

The cohorts in both countries are relatively small, but are arguably the most vulnerable members of our society. As at the end of September 2017, 6,506 young Australians aged between 15 and 17 years were receiving the benefit given to homeless young people in Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2.5% of Australia's estimated resident population was born in New Zealand. If New Zealand teenagers living in Australia received a similar payment at the same rate as their Australian counterparts, about 160 young people would be expected to receive the benefit.

WEstjustice has recently been in correspondence with Rt Hon Winston Peters, Hon Kelvin Davis and the Children's Commissioner, Judge Andrew Becroft. The official response of your government to date has been that the issue is an important one and that the New Zealand Government has raised with Australia, but that it is ultimately a matter for Australia to deal with under its social security system.

We respectfully disagree, and urge you to reconsider this stance.

We believe as the vulnerable minors involved are citizens of New Zealand but inhabitants of Australia, *both* countries have a moral and legal obligation to help fix this anomaly.

**We urge you to formally raise the issue with the Australian Government and pursue a joint solution.**

**Sincerely Yours,**

Anti-Poverty Network - SA

Australian Council of Social Service

Barwon Community Legal Service

Bridging Worx

Djerriwarrh Community Education Services

Federation of Community Legal Centres

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre

Iwi N Aus

Inner Melbourne Community Legal	Uniting Church in Australia (UCA)
Justice Connect	Uniting Church (Tasmania)
Lighthouse Foundation	Uniting Church (Victoria)
McAuley Community Services for Women	Whitelion Youth Agency Ltd
Melbourne City Mission	Victoria Maori Wardens
Melbourne Tautoko Whanau	Victorian Samoan Advisory Group
Morunga Migration	WEstjustice
Odyssey House	West Heidelberg Community Legal Service
Smart Justice	Wombat Housing & Support Service
Smart Justice for Young People	WynBay LLEN
Springvale Monash Legal Service	Wyndham Community & Education Centre
St Kilda Legal Service	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
The Koha Shed Australia INC.	Youth Junction Inc.
Tongan Victoria Association	Youth Support & Advocacy Service (YSAS)
United Pacific Council of Victoria	Youth Law

cc: Rt Hon Winston Peters, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs; Judge Andrew Becroft, New Zealand Children's Commissioner; Hon. Malcolm Turnbull, Prime Minister of Australia; Hon. Dan Tehan, Australian Minister for Social Services.

Enclosed: Couch Surfing Limbo: Legal, policy and service gaps affecting young couch surfers and couch providers in Melbourne's west.