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16 March, 2018

Social Services and Community Committee
Parliament Buildings
Private Bag 18041
Wellington 6160

Tēnā koutou

Families Commission Repeal Act Bill (the Bill)

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation *Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa* (NZNO) welcomes the opportunity to comment briefly on this Bill effecting the disestablishment of the Families Commission (the Commission). NZNO does not wish to appear before the Committee.

NZNO members - nurses, midwives and kaiāwhina - work in partnership with individuals, families, whānau and communities in all health settings throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. In the context of the Commission we consider 'families' a generic term for the many configurations of family relationship between peoples in Aotearoa, including whānau, hapu and iwi relationships. We warmly acknowledge that the Commission championed recognition of the difference between pākehā and Māori concepts of family and whānau, and an overarching inclusion of diversity. This is evidenced in their research reports including *Whānau yesterday today and tomorrow* (2011) and *Mātiro whakamua: looking over the horizon* (2011). Both reports draw on Māori knowledge, cultural practices and methods to research and analyse the stories and drivers of whānau success, and explore the role Māori women as advocates of whānau development and the important role of te Reo. The Commission has contributed to the pātaka of knowledge and enhanced our understanding acceptance and celebration of the diversity and development of family and whānau in Aotearoa.

Although we share a key function as public advocates for family wellbeing, NZNO has generally been aware that this part of the Commission's role has diminished somewhat over the past few years. Other crown entities, notably the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Human

National Office
Level 3
Crowe Horwath House
57 Willis Street
Wellington 6011

PO Box 2128
Wellington 6140

T 0800 28 38 48
www.nzno.org.nz

Rights Commission and the Ministry for Oranga Tamariki have taken a more visible lead in raising public awareness, informing, and developing policy in response to issues affecting families and whānau wellbeing (though none have the same overarching focus as the Commission). Strong professional and community relationships with, and between, various NGOs, unions, iwi, and coalitions such as UNICEF, the Salvation Army, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Living Standards movement, Tick for Kids, Rainbow communities, and local marae are also providing a sound foundation for constructive dialogue and consensus. In this context, the Families Commission advocacy function is somewhat redundant and impact of disestablishment should be minimal.

The same cannot be said, however, in relation to the Commission's second function "to monitor and evaluate programmes and interventions in the social sector, and provide social science research into key issues, programmes, and interventions across that sector (the monitoring, evaluation, and research function)" (Part 1 s 7(b), Families Commission Act 2003). This function, admirably performed by the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Unit (SUPERU), which, in effect, was the Commission, is fundamental to being able to achieve the main purpose of the Bill, ie "greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the provision of social science research and advocacy for the interests of families generally".

NZNO, in common with many of our health sector colleagues, found the analysis and guidance provided by SUPERU invaluable and, to a large extent, unique, since it was one of the few agencies which concerned itself with the evaluation of longitudinal data. We were surprised and dismayed by the disestablishment of SUPERU (the Commission) last year. Meaningful results in the state provision of health services - improved equity, improved health and safety, sustainability, cost-effectiveness - are those demonstrated over time at population level, and it has been clear for some time that we are heading in the wrong direction: despite good intentions, inequity is increasing and entrenched disparities in access to healthcare and outcomes remain. It is thus difficult to understand why a unit that enjoyed the trust and respect of people both in and outside government, and that was making such a significant contribution to improving capability, should be disestablished, and the core group of highly skilled public servants, dispersed.

Although ostensibly the Bill simply legitimises a fait accompli in terms of the Commission, it also removes regulation supporting the critical roles of SUPERU. Accordingly, we urge the Committee to

consider making provision for the monitoring, evaluation, and research function of the Families Commission Act, as performed by SUPERU, to be mandated elsewhere. We refer you to the recommendations of both the Council of Trade Unions and the Public Services Association in that respect.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marilyn Head". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marilyn" and the last name "Head" clearly distinguishable.

Marilyn Head BA, Dip Tchg, M Sc, PGCert PH
Senior Policy Analyst
DDI: 04 4946372
marilynh@nzno.org.nz