

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 23 March 2018



Welfare Reform Bill passes Senate with amendments

Proposed changes to the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017* passed the Senate this week. This is after a compromise was struck between the Government and the Nick Xenophon Team, that saw further amendments to the Bill.

Volunteering Australia has strongly campaigned on the implications of the proposed tightening of the activity requirements in Schedule 9 of the Bill. This includes the impact on people on income support and the potential to move people away from volunteering positions, which could have a profound impact on the volunteering sector.

The changes are a compromise on the original proposal, and will allow people aged 55 to 59 to return to 30 hours of volunteering per fortnight after 12 months of job search, if they are unable to find suitable paid employment and if it is determined to best suit their individual circumstances. Exemptions (or a reduction in the number of job searches) will remain in place for jobseekers who meet a select criteria.

Volunteering Australia CEO Adrienne Picone said, “We appreciate that the Government and Senate crossbench have heard our concerns on this Bill, have considered the implications of Schedule 9 on older job seekers, and taken steps to ensure that if jobseekers are unable to find suitable paid employment, they are able to employ their time practically and give back to the community through the original 30 hours of volunteering or other activity.”

Jobseekers aged 60 to the Aged Pension age will have 10 hours of Annual Activity Requirements per fortnight, which can be fully met through volunteering. These changes are due to come into effect on 20 September 2018.

Volunteering Australia emphasises that more needs to be done to address the issues impeding jobseekers from finding employment. We look forward to working with the Government on tackling these issues.

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