

15 February 2016

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Committees  
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Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



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Dear Committee Secretary,

### **Fair Work Amendment (Gender Pay Gap) Bill 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and feedback on this important legislation and proposed amendment.

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (Good Shepherd) has considered the proposed amendment, conducted further research and reviewed similar initiatives internationally to inform our position.

Good Shepherd supports the proposed amendment. Promoting women's economic security is a human rights concern and is critical in achieving gender equality. This legislative change will facilitate the promotion of remuneration equity, with the ultimate aim to achieving wage parity between men and women.

Currently, the imposed cloak of secrecy surrounding individual employee salaries enables and perpetuates discriminatory practices and workplace cultures - particularly against women - by keeping these practices hidden. By masking discrimination, women are further disadvantaged and disempowered within the workplace.

The figures in relation to the gender pay gap are well known. When coupled with other gendered social problems, such as family violence, women are placed in a particularly vulnerable position. In the research we have conducted, we have found that family violence has a "decapitalising" effect on women in terms of reduced employment participation and wages; precarious and insecure housing; and a reduction in their financial resources. The disparity between men and women's pay coupled with these pervasive and harmful gender stereotypes have an adverse impact on women's ability to achieve economic security and remain safe from violence. Women in these situations are often faced with the untenable 'choice' between violence and poverty. This only compounds the existing societal structures and norms that undervalue women in the first instance.

Removing prohibitions and hence allowing employees to discuss their salaries will increase transparency of salaries within an organisation. This transparency will provide greater opportunity for women to advocate for higher salaries, so as to be on par with their male counterparts for similar roles as discrepancies will be known. Given the inextricable link between income levels and superannuation, this amendment could also contribute to women's capacity to increase their superannuation, thus facilitating greater economic security for women in retirement.

We acknowledge that remuneration is only one way to recognise the value of an employee. It is equally important that there be greater transparency in decision-making processes when employers consider employees for promotion, career advancement and education and training opportunities. Without removing and exposing the secrecy that surrounds these workplace processes we will continue to hinder women's capacity to fully contribute to their workplace, and

*Disrupting the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage for women and girls.*

society more broadly. Further, we will struggle to reconcile the difference in economic outcomes between men and women.

We recognise that much more effort and work is required if we are to achieve gender equity. We believe this amendment will contribute to this ultimate goal. We thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment on this proposed amendment.

Yours sincerely



Andrea Lott  
Acting Chief Executive Officer