



Families Commission Act Repeal Bill

23—1

Report of the Social Services and Community Committee

April 2018

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Families Commission Act Repeal Bill

Recommendation

The Social Services and Community Committee has examined the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill and recommends that it be passed without amendment.

About the bill as introduced

The bill aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of social science research and advocacy for families. It would repeal the Families Commission Act 2003 and disestablish the Families Commission, which operates as Superu (the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit).

The commission is an autonomous Crown entity within the meaning of the Crown Entities Act 2004. Some of the commission's functions have already been transferred to the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Social Investment Agency by non-legislative means. The commission's remaining responsibilities, liabilities, and assets would be transferred to the Ministry of Social Development when this legislation came into force.

Submitters focused on the decision to disestablish the commission and the consequences, rather than the legislation. As a result, we consider that the bill requires no substantive changes.

We briefly discuss the matters raised by submitters below.

Continuing the family advocacy role

Several submitters expressed support for continuing the commission's role of advocating for families and were concerned that the advocacy functions would not be transferred to another agency. We consider that there are adequate ways to ensure that the needs and interests of families and whānau are addressed. We believe that numerous agencies and NGOs can perform this advocacy role and that a single agency with a statutory responsibility for advocating for families and whānau is not required.

We note that the social sector has changed significantly since 2004 when the commission was established. We acknowledge the commission's work on recognising the diversity of New Zealand families and determining the factors that contribute to family and whānau wellbeing.

Enhancing the use of evaluation and research

One submitter was concerned that the independent policy advice and evaluation provided by the commission would be lost when the commission is disestablished. Submitters had mixed views on whether the Social Investment Agency is the best place for this work.

Submitters commented on the need for collaboration between government agencies and NGOs, particularly to help community and voluntary organisations to make decisions. One submitter suggested that the Social Investment Agency should take on the commission's role of building the capability of NGOs within the sector.

We understand that government agencies are now expected to work together on social investment and social policy, and that the State Services Commission is helping agencies to do so.

Ongoing availability of information

Most submitters agreed that the commission produces and provides useful, valuable, and meaningful information. They stressed the importance of that information continuing to be created and accessible.

We were advised that the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for managing the remaining functions of the commission during the disestablishment process. This includes maintaining and redirecting the Superu website.

The ministry is working with the commission and the Social Investment Agency to maintain access to The Hub, the Growing Up in New Zealand research fund and existing data, and tools to support NGOs.¹ The ministry and the commission will work with stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of the changes and where to find resources.

We heard that the ministry will ensure that all archive requirements are met. It will also explore giving the Parliamentary Library access to document links.

¹ The Hub is a website that provides New Zealand social science government research related to education, health, and wellbeing.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The Families Commission Act Repeal Bill was referred to the committee on 20 February 2018. The closing date for submissions was 16 March 2018. We received and considered six submissions from interested groups and individuals. We heard oral evidence from two submitters at hearings in Wellington.

We received advice from the Ministry of Social Development.

Committee members

Gareth Hughes (Chairperson)

Darroch Ball

Hon Judith Collins

Hon Kris Faafoi

Hon Alfred Ngaro

Greg O'Connor

Maureen Pugh

Priyanca Radhakrishnan

Hon Louise Upston

Advice and evidence received

The documents that we received as advice and evidence are available on the Parliament website, www.parliament.nz.