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Government's New 'Shameful Degrading' Rule For Single Mums

It's been slammed as 'demeaning to women and belonging to the 1970s'.

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Another move to shame and humiliate single mothers. Photo: iStock

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Because apparently if you don't have a man, you can't be trusted.

In the coming months, single parents receiving a pension will be required to find someone to sign a legal document confirming that parent's relationship status. Yep, the Turnbull government believes that because I don't have a man, I'm not to be trusted.

The new requirement became law in January, and according to Centrelink, people receiving parenting payments will soon be opening letters requiring them to find a referee to confirm they are not in a relationship.

Forget about privacy; now single parents will be forced to explain their financial situation to friends in the hope that one of them will sign the document, which explicitly threatens prison for declarations that are false or misleading.

The sinister truth

It's a requirement that seems particularly sinister given that it only applies to single parents.

Aged pensioners who are single, for example, are not required to have their lack of relationship "vouched for".

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is one of several women's and welfare groups opposed to the new requirement.

"Single parents have enough on their plate trying to afford food, housing and clothing for their kids without having to get someone else to vouch for their relationship status," ACOSS chief executive, Cassandra Goldie, said.

"Single parents have been the target of cuts and attacks for years now. This latest provision marks a further intrusion and increases the powerlessness of parents who are doing the incredibly significant role of raising healthy children in our communities."



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The National Council for Single Mothers and their Children has written to Prime Minister



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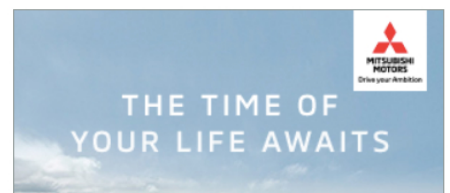


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'I tried naked yoga and here's what happened'



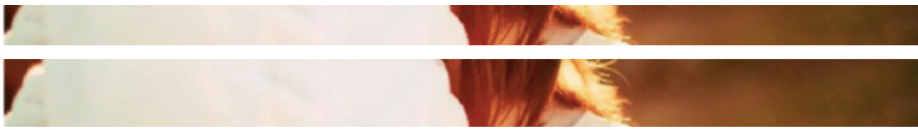


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The National Council for Single Mothers and their Children has written to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, concerned that the requirements effectively allow Centrelink to “police women’s relationship status”.

The measures were described as demeaning to women and belonging in the 1970s.

Putting vulnerable women at greater risk

The immediate fear is that the changes will prevent women from leaving abusive relationships. Many women fleeing domestic violence leave everything behind, including friends and acquaintances who could potentially vouch for them.

“We remain concerned for women who have left a violent partner and/ or women who require greater privacy as well as woman who do not have a ‘trusted third party’, noting that the third party cannot be a family member,” Terese Edwards, the council’s chief executive, said.



There are fears the new rules will make it harder for women to escape abusive relationships. Photo: PETER KELLY

Make no mistake, this is a women’s issue. And before anyone pulls out the “hey, men can be single parents too!” argument, at the last census 81.8% of single parents were female.

Of course there are those who will say, yes the new requirement is all pretty crappy, but it will help prevent fraud and isn’t it a small price to pay in return for receiving a pension? OK, let’s look at that.

The government predicts that payments will be reduced or penalties imposed for 7,400 people. According to the budget, the measure will save \$93.7m over five years.

I’m sorry, what? That’s just \$93.7 million *over five years*?

Shame and punishment

It’s hard to imagine how a decision that will significantly disadvantage thousands of women is more attractive than, say, getting Qantas, Exxon Mobil, Vodafone – in fact any of the one in five big businesses that currently pay no tax in Australia – to pay maybe a fraction of a per cent on their profits.

Some believe the extreme measure imposed to recoup such a nittance sneaks to the real

...and the onerous measure imposed to keep them a promise speaks to the real motivation behind the requirement: shame and punishment.

What? You thought you could do this parenting thing on your own? Silly girl, cop this.

And for heterosexual families, it's the Government reinforcing a notion women have spent decades trying to break down: that women without men are potential criminals. Or certainly more likely to be so than any other group receiving Centrelink benefits.

Only as significant as your significant other

Any mother trying to raise strong, confident and independent girls knows you are already up against it. You're fighting against a world that every day sends your daughters the message that who they are is not good enough. They are not pretty enough; they are less valuable in the workplace; they are only as significant as their significant other.



Raising kids alone is not easy, without restrictions like this. Photo: iStock



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Then comes the day they see the Prime Minister on the news telling them in no uncertain terms that without a partner, girls are not to be trusted.

Of course, it's not the first time Centrelink has taken a swipe at single mothers.

Famously, last year, the agency sent out Australian Federal Police branded letters that threatened the women with prison if they make incorrect declarations to Centrelink.

The letter had panicked parents ringing Centrelink professing their innocence, only to be told that they weren't actually being investigated, it was just a letter sent out to single parents reminding them of their obligations.

While it could be fairly easy to dismiss the new requirement as a mild irritation for women who are doing the right thing, this month as you sit down to binge watch the latest season of *The Handmaid's Tale*, consider this: where do you think the humiliation and criminalisation of women based on their relationship status will end up? And what did you do to resist?



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