

MEDIA STATEMENT

Wednesday 12 May 2021

There are wins for workers in the 2021 Federal Budget but as always, the detail is all important. Funding needs to be significant and ongoing. This is an opportunity for real and meaningful long-term measures supporting employment.

The events of the pandemic year have not only demonstrated the importance of safe and secure employment in maintaining wellbeing and financial stability but the importance of the community legal sector in supporting workers with their rights at work.

In general, it is heartening to see in the Budget Papers that there will be increased recurring funding for the Community Legal Services Program over the next four years – essentially doubling our sector’s capacity to promote better access to justice for the wider community.

As an employment law service, JobWatch welcomes the in-principle support for additional legal assistance for specialist lawyers with workplace and discrimination law expertise as part of the government response to the Respect@Work report. This must be appropriately funded through an ongoing budget commitment. We look forward to receiving further detail on this commitment which presents a real opportunity for a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable workers.

The removal of the \$450 per month threshold for eligibility for the superannuation guarantee will benefit the long-term financial security of many workers. Further detail of this measure must also include clarification on whether this applies to those under 18 years of age who are currently limited not only by the income threshold but also by a test of hours worked in a week.

The various measures to improve training and employment opportunities for particular industries and demographic cohorts, including the removal of the 40 hours per fortnight cap on work for international students and visa workers in selected industries, are much needed.

However, research has shown that **three in four** international students were paid below the minimum casual hourly wage in their jobs, with **62 per cent** of them not accessing help to address issues of underpayment and exploitation. This budget measure must be accompanied by increased promotion of work rights to these vulnerable cohorts and increased compliance activities by relevant statutory authorities, with further funding for community legal assistance.

Overall, we need to see increased commitment to promoting rights for workers who are currently underemployed, underpaid, unsafe or in other exploitative situations at work, with a strong commitment to ongoing wage growth in line with the growing cost of living.

Available for interview

Zana Bytheway, Executive Director, JobWatch

Contact

Amanda Chan, Communications Manager, 0433 843 643, amandac@jobwatch.org.au

About JobWatch

JobWatch is an independent, not-for-profit employment rights community legal centre supporting workers in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania with their rights at work. We are committed to improving the lives of workers, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

We believe in workplace justice and equity for all, and tailored legal information and support is a key component to achieving rights for workers. We provide this support to workers through our Telephone Information Service, our legal practice, our law reform work and community legal information.

For more information: www.jobwatch.org.au