

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 4 May 2022



State Budget focuses on job creation but forgets job quality

There is a welcome focus on job creation in the Victorian State Budget, but we must not forget a crucial component – ensuring the safety of workers, the quality of employment opportunities, and the security of income during the toughest times. We learned invaluable lessons at the height of the pandemic and we should not lose sight that protecting rights and retention of employment is key to financial security.

JobWatch, Victoria's only specialist employment rights community legal centre, calls on the Victorian Government to invest further in rights for workers. With forecasted significant employment growth in Victoria, record low unemployment rates in both metropolitan and regional areas, and high participation rates, the Victorian Government is in a unique position to further protect the rights of workers.

"Most employment law issues are typically considered a federal responsibility through national legislation such as the *Fair Work Act 2009*," says Zana Bytheway, Executive Director of JobWatch.

"However, considering that the Victorian Government has already demonstrated their willingness to step into industrial relations matters through important initiatives such as the *Victorian Sick Pay Guarantee* and investment in Wage Inspectorate Victoria, there are other measures that the state government should consider implementing to better support the rights of Victorian workers," she continues.

"Getting people into jobs is one thing," says Ms. Bytheway. "Ensuring that these jobs are safe and secure for all Victorian workers is another thing altogether."

JobWatch is calling for further policy and budgetary commitment to:

- **Addressing sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces**, including through amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* to increase regulatory functions for WorkSafe Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and ensure that non-disclosure agreements do not prevent victims of sexual harassment in making complaints to WorkSafe and other regulators
- **Supporting paid family and domestic violence leave for Victorian workers**, by building on the existing Victorian public sector offering of 20 days of paid leave, and extending this to all Victorian workers through a pilot program not dissimilar to the *Victorian Sick Pay Guarantee*
- **Implementing enforceability and compliance measures for the Victorian on-demand workforce**, through furthering the proposed Fair Conduct and Accountability Standards to include mechanisms for enforcement that include the appointment of a regulatory body – not just a support service – with oversight over compliance with the Standards, and consequences for non-compliance
- **Increasing access to justice in Victoria**, with increased funding for Victorian community legal centres to meet existing need for legal assistance and to address the continued rise in demand brought about by the pandemic and widening inequality

We need to see increased commitment to promoting rights for vulnerable Victorian workers, with a strong commitment to building nation-leading approaches for safe, secure and equitable workplaces for all.

Available for interview

- Zana Bytheway, Executive Director, JobWatch

Contact

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About JobWatch

JobWatch is an independent, not-for-profit employment rights community legal centre. We operate out of Victoria and provide assistance to over 16,000 Victorian, Queensland and Tasmanian workers about their rights at work every year. For more information: www.jobwatch.org.au