



Variety, the Children's Charity  
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Deputy Richard Renouf  
Social Security Scrutiny Panel  
Morier House  
Halkett Place  
St. Helier JE1 1DD

Dear Deputy Renouf

I am delighted that the Social Security Panel is conducting a review regarding the levels of poverty in the Island.

Almost on a daily basis we get requests via Health Visitors, CAB, Social Workers, The Bridge, schools and other organizations and individuals who have direct dealings with children and their families. These requests are for food, nappies, baby milk, baby equipment, school uniforms, shoes and other basic day to day needs. Virtually all of the families are single parent families and every family is on an income well below average. We have a simple request form where the parent is asked to declare their income and the form also gives me permission to contact Social Security to check it's accuracy. I have to say this is rarely necessary. Last year Variety helped 229 families with 476 children with basic needs. This figure does not account for special equipment, fortified milk and Pharmacy bills for low income families with severely disabled children.

We in Variety have been deeply concerned that Social Security is no longer paying the single parent allowance (£40 per week) as from last November and for those families who are receiving it, this amount is being phased out as from January this year. I met with Senator Maclean and Deputy Suzie Pinel to ask them to rescind this proposition as there is no doubt that this will mean low income families will be facing further hardship. Deputy Pinel is of the view that this will encourage the parent to pursue the absent parent for maintenance. This is most unlikely as we deal with the most vulnerable families where often the absent father is in prison, was abusive or is simply not known. Add to that, the fact that most of the parents have additional social and emotional problems mental health problems and such like.

Indeed I have only very recently had a 'phone call from a single parent Mum who asked her legal aid lawyer to contact her children's father as he had not paid maintenance ever. The consequence of that was he appeared early morning and emptied her dustbin on the doorstep and shouted abuse! Surely it is obvious that when a woman as finally got away from an abusive partner she is going to be very reluctant to make contact for maintenance.

I would like to thank you for conducting this review and to beg you to urge your fellow States Members to be aware of the poverty that some children are living in through no fault of their own. If there is anything else you would like to know please do not hesitate to contact me.