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## Open Letter to Female Members of Parliament and Senators

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21 May 2018

Dear Members of Parliament and Senators,

### **A call to oppose proposed waiting periods for migrants to access welfare support**

We write to you to express Harmony Alliance Members' deep concern regarding proposed changes to welfare access for migrants. These changes appear in the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Encouraging Self-Sufficiency for Newly Arrived Migrants) Bill 2018 and the Encouraging Self-Sufficiency for Newly Arrived Migrants—extension budget measure.

The Harmony Alliance is particularly concerned that many of the allowances subject to new and extended waiting periods are safety nets disproportionately relied upon by women. With female homelessness on the rise, and continued gendered gaps in income, superannuation and workforce participation, removing these safety nets would set a dangerous precedent at odds with an agenda of empowering women and girls. Reducing women's financial security will leave many more dependent on partners and family, and more vulnerable to controlling and violent relationships as a result.

Access to paid maternity leave is a human right and an international obligation to which Australia has committed. These proposals directly contravene that human right, and the likely ramifications for women's reproductive rights are serious. The stated intent of this change—that new migrants who decide to have children during the waiting periods allow for associated costs—ignores the fact that unexpected pregnancies are extremely common. Under the proposed changes, migrant women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant may feel financial pressure to seek an abortion, or to return to work early, which research has shown to be detrimental to development outcomes for children. Proposals to delay access to Family Tax Benefit and Parenting Payments will also impact on children of migrants—many of whom are Australian citizens.

These benefits are part of a carefully crafted welfare system, designed to invest in people early in times of crisis to prevent them from falling into the welfare trap. This measure instead risks creating longer-term support needs for migrants who find themselves in exceptionally difficult circumstances, in exchange for short-term savings for the budget.

Migrants are the people that Australia has chosen to welcome. They have been through rigorous and arduous application processes. These proposed changes will not encourage self-sufficiency, but instead risk disenfranchising a generation of future Australians.

**We call upon the female Members of Parliament and Senators to support their migrant sisters by opposing this Bill and Budget Measure.**

Signed:



HARMONY ALLIANCE

MIGRANT & REFUGEE WOMEN FOR CHANGE