**Submission**

**to the**

**Portfolio Committee on Social Development**

**on the**

**The Social Assistance Amendment Bill [B8-2018]**

**1. Introduction**

The Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office welcomes the opportunity to comment on this important Bill. The access of the vulnerable to appropriate social assistance is an important concern for the Church. Indeed, the Church’s role as a major provider of social services in times of crisis is significant. In times of distress it is important that those affected must have their human dignity and well-being restored and protected as soon as possible. This requires concern for the common good; solidarity with those in distress; and subsidiarity, which allows for the co-ordination of society's activities in a way that supports those in immediate need.

**2. Definitions**

This Bill expands the criteria for access to social assistance and provides greater clarity regarding the most appropriate grant to be accessed in times of a particular disaster. Importantly, the proposed amendment would bring the Act in line with the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002. Greater co-ordination of services results in a quicker response period, and timely delivery of the appropriate equipment and medical supplies, as well as food and water. Such an integrated approach to community services does much to contain the damage caused by the disaster.

It is noted that social assistance “means a social grant, social relief of distress, or an additional payment.’’ Such ‘additional payments’ are linked to social grants, according to the proposed section 12A(1). While we welcome the fact that social grant recipients will be able to request extra payments if they suffer a disaster, we are concerned about the huge numbers of people in our country who do not qualify for any of the social grants (not old enough for the older person’s grant, not disabled, etc.) but who nevertheless are destitute. If a disaster strikes them – a fire in an informal settlement, for example – surely they should be able to apply for an emergency payment of some kind? It seems unfair that a 60-year-old victim of such a fire could receive both the older person’s grant and an additional payment; while a destitute 59-year-old neighbour would receive neither.

**3. Social Grants**

We welcome the greater clarity regarding the recipients of various grants, particularly regarding the Child Support Grant. However, there is little effort to deal with the Foster Care Grant, which has created a crisis in the foster care system where the needs of children in need of care and protection have been merged with children who are in what is, essentially, kinship foster care.

**4. Social Responsibility**

In late November 2019, Pope Francis, speaking Tokyo, Japan with people affected by Japan’s 2011 “triple disaster” criticized society’s indifference toward the suffering of others. He said that decisions will have to be made about the use of natural resources and future energy sources, and noted other major issues, such as wars, refugees, food, economic disparities, and environmental challenges. He concluded: “But the most important thing, I believe, is to progress in building a culture capable of combating indifference.”[[1]](#endnote-1) There is a need to react with compassion toward those in distress.

“Climate change, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization and population growth contribute to an expected increase in the number and severity of emergency events [and] the humanitarian community is called to respond to an unprecedented number of people in need.”[[2]](#endnote-2) South Africa has faced many such crises during the past year. Many of these could have been avoided with better planning and foresight.

**5. Conclusion**

There is a desperate need for an integrated approach to community services and hopefully these amendments will do much to facilitate this.

*"Every person has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life... Therefore, a human being has the right to security in case of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment****…”[[3]](#endnote-3)***

We wish the Committee well in its deliberations.

For further information please contact:

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1. [https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/meeting-with-disaster-victims-pope-says-human- <https://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/emergency-response-recovery>suffering-demands-a-response-72294](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/meeting-with-disaster-victims-pope-says-human-suffering-demands-a-response-72294) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/emergency-response-recovery> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Papal Encyclical ‘Peace on Earth’ John XXIII, 1963 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)