

Tuesday, 23 June 2020

ACTU President Michele O’Neil calls on COVID Senate Inquiry to support paid pandemic leave

ACTU President Michele O’Neil will tell the Senate Inquiry into the Government’s response to COVID-19 that the response has fallen short on wage subsidies, sick leave and OHS while ignoring the impact of the pandemic on women and young people.

The ACTU call for paid pandemic leave will be a key focus of Ms O’Neil’s testimony. The ACTU has been calling for two weeks paid pandemic leave to be made available to all employees, including casuals, but despite both the Queensland and Victorian Government’s introducing a similar scheme the Morrison Government has not acted.

Ms O’Neil will tell the Inquiry the Government was slow to act in introducing a wage subsidy and has failed to expand the system to those who are excluded or extend it beyond September despite underspending by \$60 billion.

The Morrison Government has failed to address the gaps the pandemic has exposed in our OHS system, and despite evidence - including polling conducted for the ACTU which showed only a tiny proportion of businesses were ready for workers to return – has failed to update the system to ensure that working people are kept safe.

The Government has also failed to recognise the disproportionate impact the pandemic is having on young people and women, who have lost the majority of jobs and hours of work since the beginning of the shutdown.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O’Neil:

“Calls to expand and extend JobKeeper, provide pandemic leave, close loopholes in the OHS system and provide support for women and young people have fallen on deaf ears.

“We have seen two of the biggest states introduce a form of paid support for workers without paid leave entitlements to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and to encourage testing and isolation yet the Morrison Government refuses to help the more than three million Australian’s at risk of falling ill and potentially spreading the virus without access to sick leave.

“Now the Morrison Government is already talking about winding up JobKeeper while we set new records for those out of work and needing more hours. We need to be doing more to support working people and the economy, not less.

“The ACTU has published an eight-point plan which addresses all of these issues and we stand ready to discuss it with the Government.

“The fight against the virus isn’t over, and the Morrison Government must do more to ensure that Australian workers are protected.”

ENDS

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