

June 14th, 2005

The NSW Branch of the Public Health Association of Australia is writing to you to voice its support for the private members bill proposed by Mr Petro Georgio MP to appoint an independent judicial assessor to undertake reviews, overturning the Immigration Department's current role in determining detention policy.

We are extremely disturbed by the documented harm that the current mandatory detention policy and processes bring upon people, including babies and children, many of whom have come from highly traumatic situations. We call on Members of Parliament to publicly express their support for the bill. Australia, like other civilized nations, should have a humane and transparent asylum seekers policy that does not further victimise those already in great need.

It is reasonable to allow for health and security checks for asylum seekers, and that these should occur within a maximum of twelve months (as is the case in many other countries). There are well documented public health, physical health and mental health consequences for asylum seekers under the current system of providing only temporary protection visas, and then deporting refugees sometimes up to ten years later. This is also inhumane practice.

The Australian Migration Act, the system and the processes need to be focussed strongly on treating all people humanely. The private members bill submitted by Mr Georgio provides an ideal opportunity to reform the current harsh and inhumane system.

The PHAA believes that this Bill will provide asylum seekers with a clear end to their time in detention, something that will undoubtedly increase their mental and physical wellbeing. By allowing refugees to gain permanent protection visas, we will ensure those who have assimilated into Australian communities are not arbitrarily uprooted from their communities.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Garth Alperstein
President
on behalf of the PHAA, NSW Branch