



Kevin Andrews MP

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Main Committee - Petition to assist the homeless.

Tuesday, 22 June 2010

I present a petition, which has been approved by the Standing Committee on Petitions, in which the petitioners draw to the attention of the House that Australia has more than 100,000 homeless people, with more than 15,000 sleeping on the streets every night. They ask the House that the government immediately provide emergency assistance to the more than 15,000 Aussie street-sleeping homeless by providing them with specially made for the homeless emergency backpack swags with built-in mattresses, which would provide all-weather protection and show the homeless that Australians do care.

The chairman and founder of the organisation Swags for Homeless came to see me recently in my electorate office and demonstrated this protection, which is a tent with a built-in mattress which can be rolled up and easily carried about. This is something which would be very useful because one of the difficulties for homeless people is not only not having accommodation in the first place but the temporary nature of the shelter which they are forced in many cases, tragically, to change from night to night. This at least, while not solving the homeless problem in itself, would be some assistance for those who, regrettably, are homeless.

We know that the government has announced a \$10 million boost for the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program, which was an initiative of the previous government from April 2006 by the then Prime Minister, Mr Howard, and the then Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, Mr Pyne. That program has had strong cross-party endorsement. The 2006 census recorded 105,000 people on the streets; however, there is no concise indicator for homelessness in Australia. The number of homeless may in fact be many more than that figure. Service providers like St Vincent de Paul, Youth off the Streets and others have noted a 'significant increase' in the number of homeless since the promise was made in 2008 by the current Prime Minister to halve homelessness by 2020.

On the government's own projections, this additional funding is only \$33 per homeless person per year—not even enough to buy a homeless person a roof over their head for one night, much less for a year. We have millions upon millions of dollars being expended, indeed wasted, on government advertising. If that amount could be spent on the most unfortunate—those who are homeless through, in many cases, no fault of their own—then it would be a much better use of that money. It is for that reason that I am proud and delighted to be able to present this petition on behalf of Swags for Homeless and to ask the government and the relevant minister to take note of this and to do something of practical assistance to these people.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of undersigned draws to the attention of the House:

Australia has 100,000+ homeless with 15,000+ sleeping on the street everynight. The Rudd Government currently has no policy to assist the 15,000+ sleeping outside tonight.

We therefore ask the House to:

I want the Government to immediately provide emergency assistance to 15,000+ Aussie Street Sleeping Homeless by providing them with specially made for the homeless Emergency Backpack Swags (with built-in mattress) - providing all weather protection and showing Homeless that Aussies do care.