

**MEDIA RELEASE
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Mr Dutton, there is nothing simple about seeking asylum. New Federal Government policies will force destitution and threaten the lives of families.

St Francis Social Services, operator of the House of Welcome, strongly condemns Mr Dutton's announcement that all people seeking Australia's protection that have arrived by boat must lodge their applications for protection by 1 October 2017 or immediately lose government provided financial support and be subject to deportation.

Chief Executive Officer, St Francis Social Services, Mrs Lyn Harrison is horrified that Mr Dutton's announcement drastically simplifies the process of seeking asylum that is forced on families seeking Australia's safety.

"It takes on average, 14 hours for lawyers to provide adequate legal advice to support an application for asylum. There are thousands of people seeking asylum on legal assistance waiting lists. The idea that someone without access to legal advice and without access to an interpreter can fulfil this task on their own by October is not only incredibly unfair, it rejects the UN Convention of Human Rights, threatens the mental health of those affected and puts the lives of men, women and children at risk."

St Francis Social Services operates the House of Welcome which provides accommodation, case work, English lessons, financial and employment assistance to people seeking asylum. The new policies will put considerable strain on the already stretched service that provide support to those with least options.

Mrs Harrison is horrified that Mr Dutton's policy announcement includes women, including pregnant women, children and babies.

"How can the Government ingratiate themselves for not removing access to education and Medicare while they force families into homelessness? What use is education if you have nowhere to sleep? What kind of society rejects the application for protection of a child and forces them to return to a land where their life is in danger?" She asks.

Mrs Harrison calls on the government to either abolish the policy or appoint enough lawyers and interpreters to ensure every person seeking asylum has the access to assistance they need to ensure a fair and just process of determination as well as the humanitarian support they are due throughout the process.

“There is nothing simple about the situation of a family who has risked their lives to seek asylum. Australia must do what we can to ensure children have every opportunity to receive protection.” She said.

There are approximately 7500 people seeking asylum in Australia who will be directly impacted by this policy change.

To donate to House of Welcome, please visit: www.stfrancis.org.au

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

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About House of Welcome

Since 2001, the House of Welcome has existed to welcome, shelter and empower people seeking asylum and refugees regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, nationality or religion. We provide client-centred holistic supports that nurture hope, advocate for justice and promote self-reliance, whilst acknowledging the dignity and the rights of each individual. Services provided include: Accommodation, case work, employment & financial assistance, household necessities, English lessons, community luncheons and the Welcome Feast social enterprise.

St Francis Social Services vision is for a society in which there is full recognition of the dignity, equality, human rights and humanity of all people. We work towards this by providing services that uphold the dignity of each person by providing support and advocacy to the most disadvantaged and marginalised within our community.