New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Petitions Committee
Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Petihana

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Petition of Byron Donaldson: Remove Supported Living Payment review for people with lifelong disabilities

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Greg O'Connor, Chairperson

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Petition of Byron Donaldson

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Byron Donaldson—Remove Supported Living Payment review for people with lifelong disabilities—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request regarding Supported Living Payment reviews

This petition was signed by 3,531 people. It was presented to the House by Ricardo Menéndez March on 17 February 2026, and requests:

> That the House of Representatives remove Supported Living Payment benefit reviews for people with lifelong disabilities.

About the Supported Living Payment

The Supported Living Payment (SLP) is a weekly benefit payment to help a person, or someone caring for that person, who cannot work 15 hours or more per week because of a significant health condition, injury, or disability. To qualify for the SLP, the recipient must be permanently and severely restricted in their ability to work because of a health condition, injury or disability, or be totally blind.

Annual circumstances review

A person receiving the SLP is required to have their circumstances reviewed once every 52 weeks. The review checks for any changes to the recipient's circumstances, determines whether the recipient still qualifies for the SLP, and ensures the recipient is getting the correct rate of payment.

Work capacity review

SLP recipients are also required to undertake capacity-to-work assessments every two years. Work and Income can request an updated medical certificate to check how the recipient's health condition or disability affects their work capacity.

If the Ministry of Social Development considers that a recipient's condition or disability is unlikely to improve enough that they will ever be able to regularly work 15 hours per week, the SLP can be granted through "simplified access" and the recipient will never have their work capacity reassessed.

There are four categories that enable recipients to access the SLP through "simplified access" without having a detailed assessment of their capacity to work. They are: being totally blind; being terminally ill; having severe intellectual or cognitive impairment; or having a disorder that has reached a stage of deterioration to the extent that the condition severely impairs their ability to function and is unlikely to improve.[1]

[1] More information on simplified access to the SLP can be found here.

Comments from the petitioner

The petitioner believes that periodic reviews:

- are unnecessary, as “permanent disabilities do not improve” and people with them will continuously be eligible for the SLP
- waste public resources, as staff are required to review cases where the outcome will obviously be unchanged
- undermine the dignity of SLP recipients who must repeatedly “prove” that they have a permanent disability
- cause harm to SLP recipients, as periodic reviews create stress, uncertainty, and administrative pressure for people already facing significant barriers
- do not align with international best practice.

The petitioner requests that the House:

- create a formal non-reviewable category for conditions that are permanent and irreversible
- immediately end periodic reviews for SLP recipients with medically confirmed lifelong disabilities
- update Work and Income operational policy to ensure that case managers cannot schedule unnecessary reviews, and redirect administrative effort toward cases where reassessment is relevant.

In his oral evidence, the petitioner told us about his experience navigating periodic reviews. He described having to make appointments with the doctor, gathering documents, and waiting for ministry responses, while living with the fear that the review could disrupt or remove essential income, especially if information was lost or misrepresented through the process. The petitioner also noted that a lifelong permanent disability does not change, but the review process treats the SLP recipient as though it could. This means that the recipient is shouldered with having to “prove” they are disabled, a process which can be demeaning and unnecessary when their lifelong disability is already medically confirmed.

The petitioner considers that removing periodic reviews is a simple, effective reform that would improve wellbeing, uphold dignity, and strengthen the fairness and efficiency of the SLP system.

Comments from CCS Disability Action

CCS Disability Action, established in 1935, is a nationwide organisation that provides a range of disability support services and advocates for the inclusion of disabled people in the community. CCS Disability Action supports the petition and strongly agrees that the current system is ineffective, harmful to disabled people, and in desperate need of urgent review.

CCS Disability Action said that some periodic reviews require the renewal of a medical certificate, usually through a visit to the GP. It argued that this creates significant barriers for disabled people to continue to access the SLP. Disabled people are overrepresented in most measures of financial hardship, and the cost of a GP visit can be prohibitive. Also, disabled

people are particularly vulnerable to the stress, uncertainty, and administrative burden of having to repeatedly engage with the welfare system.

CCS Disability Action also considers it unfair and unethical to expect disabled people who have been previously medically assessed as having a permanent or lifelong disability or health condition to pay to prove that their permanent condition is still permanent.

CCS Disability Action told us that many people with disabilities are unaware of the simplified access pathway. We also heard that many medical professionals are unclear about the process and the eligibility criteria.

Requiring disabled people to renew medical certificates or undertake a review is also a waste of public resources, argued CCS Disability Action. GP practices should be prioritising patient treatment rather than confirming injuries and disabilities that have already been assessed as permanent and lifelong.

CCS Disability Action considers that the current review requirements are demeaning to disabled people and inconsistent with a rights-based disability approach. Being subject to repeated reviews undermines a person's dignity as they are required to continue to justify their condition and need for support when their condition has already been assessed as permanent.

CCS Disability Action supports the petitioner's recommendation to end periodic medical reviews for SLP recipients with medically confirmed lifelong disabilities or conditions. It also supports the petitioner's recommendation to consult with the disability community and medical professionals to develop clear and consistent criteria about conditions, disabilities, and impairments that should be treated as permanent and irreversible. These criteria would be used to determine review exemptions, such as the simplified access. It further urges the government to:

- revert to previous timeframes for benefit obligation failures counting against a person (12 months instead of the current 24 months), as the longer period increases the risk of sanctions or benefit cuts for disabled people
- consult with the disability community to reduce barriers and accessibility issues in engaging with the welfare system, and work to improve the system so that it is accessible and user-centred.

Comments from the Ministry of Social Development

The Ministry of Social Development provides benefits, like the SLP, through Work and Income New Zealand.

The ministry explained that a key purpose of the welfare system is to support people to find or retain employment. Like other beneficiaries, SLP recipients are subject to work preparation obligations, with exemptions where appropriate.

The ministry confirmed that many SLP recipients will qualify for "simplified access" to the SLP. We heard that, as of March 2026, around 108,500 people were receiving the SLP, and about 12 percent (13,500) received it through simplified access.

The ministry acknowledges that the experience of applying for support can sometimes be challenging. It stated that it works to administer support in ways that are fair, transparent and responsive to individual needs.

Comments from the New Zealand Disability Support Network

The New Zealand Disability Support Network (NZDSN), established in 2010, is a network of organisations and individuals that provide support services to disabled people. It works to help disabled people to live good lives, including participation in education, community life, and employment.

NZDSN acknowledges the petitioner's concern and agrees that no disabled person should be repeatedly required to prove that they still have a permanent disability or medical condition that will not change. NZDSN agrees with both the petitioner and CCS Disability Action that this is demeaning and stressful for the SLP recipient and creates unnecessary administrative work in the health and welfare systems.

Many people with lifelong disabilities are actively employed

While NZDSN acknowledges the petitioner's intent to reduce the burden and stress for SLP recipients with lifelong disabilities and conditions, it does not support a blanket removal of periodic reviews for all such recipients. It said that lifelong disabilities should not automatically exempt people from a review or discussion about employment; many people with lifelong disabilities are able to work and are actively employed. NZDSN said that this is because a diagnosis alone does not determine a person's capacity to work. Additionally, the functional impact of a condition or disability can vary widely between individuals with the same diagnosis, such as autism spectrum disorder, for example.

NZDSN agrees with the petitioner that periodic reviews would be inappropriate for SLP recipients who have severe and lifelong conditions where it can be clearly and robustly established that they will never be able to engage in employment. However, NZDSN considers that simplified access should be granted on a case-by-case basis rather than through the creation of a blanket category.

Employment is a critical contributor to positive life outcomes

NZDSN strongly supports helping disabled people into employment wherever possible. It said that employment is a critical contributor to positive life outcomes, including:

- improved financial independence and reduced poverty
- enhanced wellbeing, confidence, and sense of purpose
- increased social inclusion and connection
- better long-term health outcomes
- greater autonomy and self-determination.

NZDSN notes that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms the right of disabled people to work on an equal basis with others.[2] Supporting

[2] Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

disabled people to access and participate in employment is not only good practice but also aligns with New Zealand's international obligations.

Being permanently on a benefit and excluded from work opportunities can have serious unintended consequences, argued NZDSN. These can include increased poverty risk, reduced opportunities for personal development and skill-building, increased social isolation, long-term dependency, lower overall wellbeing, and poorer life outcomes. In seeking to remove barriers for people with lifelong disabilities and conditions, said NZDSN, it is important not to create other barriers by institutionalising low expectations and permanently excluding people from opportunities they may want and be able to pursue.

Regular reviews are a helpful tool for most SLP recipients

NZDSN states that even if an SLP recipient's health condition or disability does not change over time, their circumstances, access to support, and ability to manage their condition can. Regular reviews aim to ensure that recipients are getting appropriate support, which may include connecting them with new services or technologies, updated workplace practices and adaptations, skills and development training, and other supports that might not have been previously available.

NZDSN also considers that regular reviews maintain the system's integrity and fairness by ensuring that public funding is targeted appropriately and consistently across the system.

Our response to the petition

We thank the petitioner for bringing this matter to us and appreciate him sharing his experience of navigating the SLP system. We commend him for his intent to improve the wellbeing of people with lifelong disabilities and conditions, uphold their dignity, and strengthen the fairness and efficiency of the SLP system.

We do not agree with the petitioner's request to create a formal category for conditions that are permanent and irreversible for the purpose of being excluded from periodic reviews. Neither do we agree with the petitioner's request to immediately end periodic reviews for SLP recipients with medically confirmed lifelong disabilities and conditions. We consider that there will be SLP recipients who have conditions that completely restrict their capacity to work and are unlikely to improve, and that these recipients should be granted simplified access so that they are excluded from future work capacity reviews. But we also consider that many SLP recipients would benefit from periodic reviews to ensure they are aware of and have access to the latest supports and adaptations that could help them realise employment opportunities that may not have previously been available to them.

We encourage the ministry to improve its practices

Considering the petitioner's experience and the issues raised in submissions, we encourage the Ministry of Social Development to take the following steps.

Ensure that information about simplified access is clearer

The ministry said that when it receives a new SLP application it considers whether the application qualifies for simplified access. If an applicant is not granted simplified access,

they have the right to appeal this decision to the Medical Appeals Board. However, we note that the applicant may not be aware that this pathway, or right of appeal, exists.

We encourage the ministry to provide information about simplified access at critical points in the SLP application process. This is so that applicants (and medical professionals who complete the medical certificate) might better understand whether an applicant might qualify for simplified access.

Ensure that periodic reviews enhance the mana of the SLP recipient

Periodic reviews should not leave SLP recipients feeling fear, uncertainty, or that they are viewed with suspicion in needing to prove their disability or health condition to remain eligible for income support. Reviews should be genuinely constructive and supportive. They should consider whether the recipient's circumstances or aspirations have changed and whether new services, technologies, training, or workplace adaptations could help them pursue work opportunities. This should be a key focus of the ministry's communications with SLP recipients throughout the review process.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the advocates, communities, and workplaces that recognise the potential of people with disabilities and lifelong conditions, respond to their aspirations, and make their participation possible and meaningful.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was signed by 3,531 people on the Parliament website. It was presented to the House by Ricardo Menéndez March on 17 February 2026 and referred to us that day. We met between 12 March and 17 September 2026 to consider it. We received written submissions and heard oral evidence from the petitioner, CCS Disability Action, the New Zealand Disability Support Network, and the Ministry of Social Development.

Committee members

Greg O'Connor (Chairperson)
Hon Andrew Bayly (from 1 July 2026)
Greg Fleming
Paolo Garcia (until 1 July 2026)
Celia Wade-Brown

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on the Parliament website.

A recording of our hearing can be accessed online on the Parliament website