



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

19 MAY 2017

Dear

On 21 April 2017, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment transferred questions relating to benefit payments made to polygamous families for a reply, to the Ministry of Social Development.

Each of your questions will be addressed in turn.

- *Can you please identify the Ministry of Social Development benefit entitlements that polygamous families can access?*

Multiple marriages are not recognised under the Social Security Act and should such a circumstance arise where a person applied for a benefit with multiple "wives", the Ministry would only be able to treat one wife as being married to a spouse (or to be living in a relationship in the nature of marriage with a spouse) at any one time.

This is consistent with the Social Security Act 1964 legislation. The relevant section of the Act is Section 63 - Conjugal status for benefit purposes, which can be found at the following link:

www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1964/0136/latest/DLM363101.html

As such, the other "wives" may be regarded for benefit purposes as being either single or sole parents, depending on their individual circumstances. They may be entitled to receive a benefit in their own right depending on their individual circumstances. Each situation would be assessed on a case by case basis.

- *What was the Ministry of Social Development or benefit burden placed on the country by polygamous families who have immigrated to New Zealand over the last five years?*

I am unable to provide you with information regarding the amount of assistance paid to polygamous families who have immigrated to New Zealand over the last five years as this information may be recorded on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would be required to manually review hundreds of thousands of files. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

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Even if this work was undertaken, a client may be in a polygamous relationship and not have this noted in their file. As such this reporting would not be robust.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response regarding polygamous families with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ruth Bound', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Ruth Bound
Deputy Chief Executive