

25 November 2020

Hon Steven Marshall MP
Premier of South Australia
State Administration Centre
200 Victoria Square
ADELAIDE SA 5000

Dear Premier

We are a coalition of unions, peak bodies, community organisations, faith groups, student organisations, workers' collectives, community leaders, activists and concerned citizens.

We strongly reject the suggestion that blame for the decision to lock down the state can be laid at the feet of a single worker. We are thankful that the government has now publicly recognised that the decision to lock down was based on a range of factors.

Nevertheless, the initial response from the government has led some in our community to vindictively turn on that individual, and it has drawn attention away from the structural conditions of work that have contributed to the transmission of COVID in our state and country.

We do not know much about the circumstances of the individual at the centre of this controversy. What we do know, is that this man was on a temporary graduate visa and he was working two jobs.

Temporary visa holders are amongst the most at risk in our community. These workers are over-represented in frontline jobs that are essential to our economy. They are also our family members, our friends and our workmates. These workers are not in receipt of wage subsidies or government welfare payments. The pressure on them, in this global pandemic, is extreme.

We will not beat this virus until we look after all members of our community, irrespective of their citizenship status.

As citizens with wide experience of our workforce and its conditions, we know that current working conditions in our state mean that many workers are forced to work multiple jobs to earn a living. Others work for below the legal wage and are subject to wage theft. Many are paid in cash and have little power to argue their conditions of work.

All of these issues contribute to working conditions that expose workers to risks, including the risk of contracting COVID.

Insecure work is the Achilles heel of our pandemic response. As long as essential workers like security guards and care workers on the frontline of this crisis are forced to work multiple jobs

to make ends meet, we will not be able to effectively combat the spread of this virus. We have seen this in our state, in Victoria and throughout the world.

Our Chief Public Health Officer, Professor Nicola Spurrier, said it best when she identified the challenges of a casualised workforce, in which people must work multiple jobs in order to gain a full income. It is imperative to our fight against this pandemic that workers have the security of a full income, so that they don't have to undertake multiple jobs while they are working in high-risk workplaces like nursing homes, aged care, hospitals, and correctional services.

We believe that it is the responsibility of our state, territory and Federal governments to put the structures in place to ensure that workers can be safe, speak up at work, and lead dignified lives whilst holding a single, secure job.

We are also concerned about the welfare of casual and insecure workers who have lost income in recent days. Casual workers who were directed to stop work for the lockdown did so for the sake of our community. But many of them were left without any paid leave or compensation for the loss of hours. Insecure and casual work is the reason that lock down was so devastating for many South Australian workers.

This is not just an issue of decency: our health response will only be as strong as the structures, social and economic, that underpin it.

This pandemic will be defeated by a compassionate and kind community, unified by our common purpose. The virus cannot be defeated by individualised vilification or social division.

We stand with all members of the community and the sacrifice and solidarity they have demonstrated in this unprecedented time.

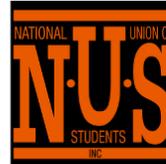
This pandemic has posed great challenges to governments both here in Australia and around the world, and we acknowledge the good decisions of your government that have helped to protect South Australia, and our communities, from what could have been a much worse scenario than we face today. Some of these have been complex decisions, with high stakes attached.

As the leader of the South Australian government, we look to you for your continued positive leadership and accountability.

We call on you as our leader to embrace these values, both in your words and in your actions. The spirit and the lives of our community depend upon it.

Sincerely





SA Coalition for Welfare Rights



Concerned Citizens:

- The Honourable Steph Key
- The Honourable Greg Stevens
- Barbara Pocock Emeritus Professor AM
- Dr Marinella Marmo - Associate Professor of Criminology, Flinders University
- Dr. Damian Mead- G.P. Brian Burdekin Clinic, Selby St. Adelaide
- Sister Janet Mead - Chairperson, The Adelaide Day Centre for Homeless
- Reverend Rob MacPherson- Minister, Unitarian Church of South Australia
- Edward Cavanough – Director of Policy McKell Institute
- Michelle Hogan - Chair of the Working Women's Centre SA Inc
- Emma Thornton - Practice Group Leader Johnston Withers Lawyers
- Dash Taylor Johnson - Vice President, Australian Education Union
- Pas Forgione - Anti-poverty activist
- Alexander Baxter – Flinders University
- Kym Davey
- Deborah Clark