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MEDIA RELEASE

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To: News Editor
From: UnitingCare West, Media Contact – Michelle Snowden Telephone 9355 9023

UNITINGCARE WEST CALLS UPON STATE GOVERNMENT TO OPPOSE TRUANCY LEGISLATION IN CANNINGTON

One of the states' largest charity groups, UnitingCare West has called upon the Barnett State Government to urgently confirm its opposition to school truancy legislation [the Schooling Requirements Bill 2008], which was to have been introduced in the Cannington region on 1 January 2009.

UnitingCare West opposes the school truancy legislation in its entirety especially the proposed quarantining of any Centrelink payments or benefits.

UnitingCare West provides services and programs throughout the Cannington region and has serious concerns about the negative impact of the truancy legislation. We do not support the proposed amendments being sought by Robyn McSweeney, the State Minister for Child Protection, which may include quarantining of welfare payments of parents of truant children.

UnitingCare West has asked Minister Robyn McSweeney not to support the school truancy trial in Cannington and has also written to Liz Constable, State Minister for Education asking that the State Government not sign the Bilateral Agreement required for the go ahead.

Chris Hall, Chief Executive Officer said " We have maintained all along that this Commonwealth legislation is punitive and far too radical in nature. It is essential to recognise that the causes of school truancy are very complex and multi-dimensional. Research both nationally and internationally has shown that single interventions have proved ineffective, and that policies linking welfare payments to school attendance have no positive effect upon school truancy or retention rates."

" Interventions need to address causal factors. This legislation is basically flawed and we do not support any form of income quarantining."

Many of the families expected to be affected by this proposed legislation are already living on low incomes and are amongst the most marginalised and disadvantaged in our community.

Truancy is a national problem and UnitingCare West remains committed to working with both Federal and State Governments to address truancy.

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