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19 November 2020

Honourable Minister Andrew Little
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Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Kia orana, Fakalofa lahi atu, Malo ni, Bula vinaka and Greetings to you Minister Andrew Little

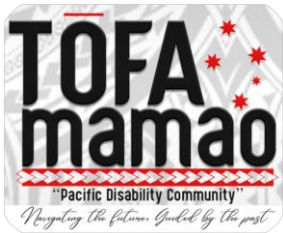
First of all, congratulations for achieving a clear mandate from the people of New Zealand in the 2020 General Election. Also, I would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as the Minister of Health.

It is that portfolio responsibility that I write you this letter, the same letter previously sent to the Rt Honourable Prime Minister Jacinta Ardern, former Minister of Health Chris Hipkins as well as other key ministers on the 13th July 2020.

I write to you on behalf of the Pacific Disability Community, Tofa Mamao Collective to express our concerns with the recommendations in the Health and Disability System Review Report regarding the future of Disability Support Services. We also provide you with an alternative for your consideration.

We understand that a collective response from the Pacific providers has been submitted, but we as people with lived experience would like to bring to your attention the journey that the disability community have endured for many decades has been unnecessarily painful and challenging. The possible decision of devolving services to DHBs will be seen by our community as retrograde and counter-productive.

It was not that long ago that disability was viewed through the lenses of superstition and religious belief, i.e. curse, punishment, and the sins of the parents. This view was later replaced with the medical model, as a condition that must be fixed. Expensive hospitals and institutions were built to house and hide disabled people from society. But thanks to the courage of disabled people and their families through sustained advocacy from the 1970's through to the 1990's, the social model became accepted as the way that disabled people's holistic needs could be met, which also led to the closure of many hospitals and institutions (thank God). For the first time, disabled people were not primarily defined by their disability, instead were seen as people with aspirations like any other New Zealand citizen.



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Tofa Mamao recognises that the time is right for some transformational and structural change in our sector. However, we do not believe those proposed in the report are the right ones. In our experience, DHBs have limited knowledge and experience of disability issues generally. They are essentially medically-based with little appreciation for social, cultural, economic and 'every day' influences on disabled peoples lives. DHBs are also fiscally-driven, and therefore disability will always be competing with other services. Also, DHBs generally adopt different approaches to services, and therefore the access and support our disabled people receive will very much be dependent on the preceding factors; and inconsistent.

Tofa Mamao recommends the following alternative for your consideration:

Create a Ministry for Disabled People (People with Disabilities). We recommend combining the Office of Disability Issues currently within the Ministry of Social Development, with the Disability Support Services directorate currently within the Ministry of Health, to enable the new Ministry to happen. This model is not dissimilar to Te Puni Kokiri for Maori, Ministry for Pacific Peoples and Ministry for Women. This will ensure disability issues are prioritised; there is a collective (and national) response to disability issues; and that decisions made in relation to disability issues are evidenced-based and consistent. The overarching principle that must be non-negotiable in this arrangement is leadership by disabled people and the workforce to be drawn from its community.

We as Tofa Mamao welcome any opportunity to discuss this matter of critical importance with you further and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Tunumafono Ava Faamoe MNZM
National Executive Officer

CC – Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Hon Grant Robertson, Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Hon Chris Hipkins, Hon Aupito William Sio, Hon Jenny Salesa and Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall