



## **Amanda Rishworth MP**

Member for Kingston

Speech to Federal Parliament

7 September 2009

### **Unfair administrative fees for cash payments**

**Ms Rishworth** (Kingston) (8:15 PM) —I am also very pleased to support his motion and to highlight the growing disappointment of many of my constituents who are finding it harder to pay in cash for goods and services. This issue has once again been placed in the community spotlight after Telstra announced that a \$2.20 fee will apply for each bill payment that is sent through the mail or made in person at Australia Post or at a Telstra shop from 14 September. While I acknowledge that Telstra are one of the last telecommunications service providers to implement such a fee and they have taken into consideration the need to make automatic and other exemptions, Telstra have contributed to the growing inequity of payment services which are rightly expected by the general public.

Companies have set a dangerous precedent by isolating loyal customers who enjoy the interaction of one-on-one customer service. Unfortunately, this growing trend is not just isolated to telecommunications. Many other services are following suit by favouring electronic or phone payment services rather than encouraging face-to-face cash payments. There are still people in our community who are not comfortable with these payment options. The previous speaker alluded to that. While many of our seniors have embraced technology, others have been left behind. It is unfortunate that they will be the ones directly affected by this trend. Being required to provide one's personal details over the phone or on the internet is just not accepted by some members of our community. It is disappointing that the alternative method of cash payments is now being charged for.

Often many of the new payment options require one to have a credit card. While many people in our community have a credit card, there are community members who do not use a credit card because they do not wish to fall in the debt trap. Even though others may want to pay by credit card they may not be able to obtain one and therefore will not be able to use that method. As the motion states, it is likely those who can least afford who will be adversely affected by these extra charges to pay in cash.

**Mr Sidebottom** —It is a poverty tax.

**Ms Rishworth** —It is a poverty tax. Many of my constituents often complain about the lack of customer service which they once enjoyed when purchasing goods or services. They remember a time when they built a relationship with their local service providers. Now these customers are today being charged to enjoy the pleasure of face-to-face customer service. I want to mention a couple of issues brought up by my constituents. Paul, a resident of Woodcroft in my electorate of Kingston, emailed me with his great disappointment over Telstra charging this fee in what he deemed an unnecessary charge for customer service. Paul raised a very important issue. He believes that this fee discriminates against people with no online access. We must keep in mind—and I know that members here today experience the same issue as I do in my electorate—that a lot of people do not have access to ADSL broadband and, even if they want to pay online, they are unable to do so. As an aside, I would like to commend the government's visionary approach to building a national broadband network because this is very important, but there are many customers and people who do not have access to broadband and they need to pay in cash.

From the correspondence I have been receiving from both Telstra and Optus customers, it is not just the fee increase that has angered them. They are frustrated that they will have to pay extra for what they see as a very basic service. Peter from Christies Beach has highlighted to me via email that it is an unfair charge, one which he believes is nothing more than a fee for nothing. This motion which seeks support for looking at this in a very detailed way is really just asking for a standard service in our community—the ability to make payments in legal tender in person if people choose to do so. I really support the part of the motion that looks at the need to investigate the impact that these types of charge have and I commend the motion to the House.