

12 June 2026

Submission to the Committee Secretariat of Social Services and Community Committee on the **Disability Support Services Bill**.

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland welcomes the opportunity to submit on the **Disability Support Services Bill**. Our contribution draws on Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and our longstanding commitment to promoting human dignity, social justice, and the common good in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We value the opportunity to support legislation that seeks to improve outcomes for people living with disabilities and limitations, their whānau, and communities.

Disability policy is a critical measure of how society values each person's inherent dignity and ensures full participation in community life.

We also acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi as foundational to just and equitable public policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. We encourage that the Bill give practical effect to Te Tiriti principles of partnership, protection, participation, and equity, particularly for **Tāngata Whaikaha Māori** - Māori living with disability.

We support the intent of the Bill to improve disability services and system sustainability. However, legislation should be strengthened by a rights-based, person-centred and Te Tiriti consistent framework to ensure it upholds:

- The dignity and autonomy of persons living with disabilities and limitations
- Equitable access to services
- The Crown's Te Tiriti obligations

Lived Experience and Participation

Consistent with both CST and Te Tiriti principles, we emphasise with the greatest importance, the exclusive inclusion of meaningful and direct participation by those living with disabilities, their whānau and communities. *Christifideles Laici* reminds us that “*all are called to participate in the life and mission of society.*”¹ Subsidiarity requires that those most affected be central in shaping the systems that govern their lives

¹ John Paul II. (1988, December 30). *Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*. Wwww.vatican.va. The Holy See.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html n.3.

We strongly encourage the Select Committee to prioritise hearing from:

- Those directly affected and living with disabilities and limitations
- Tāngata Whaikaha Māori² who identify as living with disabilities
- Whānau and Carers
- Community, Healthcare and Faith-based providers

No-one can better tell their story than those living with disability, those who care for loved ones with disabilities, and those who have chosen the specific vocation of disability respite and healthcare. There is no adequate replacement for their voice. Justice and subsidiarity demand that their voice in all forms, whether Te Reo Māori, NZSL, English or Māori Braille, be recognised and recorded in the development of legislation that directly affect their lives and livelihoods. Having stated this, we will keep our submission short, as we are not a direct disability provider, but a Commission that advocates for the justice, equity and equality of those who may not be able to advocate for themselves.

Guiding Principles

Our submission strongly affirms:

Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

- Dignity of the human person
- Preferential option for the vulnerable
- Participation and inclusion
- Solidarity and the common good
- Subsidiarity (supporting individuals and whānau)

Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Principles and Obligations)

- **Partnership:** shared decision-making with Māori and Tāngata Whaikaha Māori
- **Protection:** safeguarding equitable outcomes and cultural wellbeing
- **Participation:** ensuring fair access and voice
- **Equity:** addressing systemic disadvantage

Key Areas of Comment on the Bill

- **Purpose and Principles of the Act**

² Tibble, M. (2015). *Finding our name | Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People*. Govt.nz.
<https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/about-us/who-we-are/finding-our-names#scroll-to-1>

We support inclusion of a clear purpose statement. As Fratelli Tutti teaches, “*Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally.*”³ This Bill must explicitly affirm that dignity is inherent and cannot be diminished by disability or limitation.

However, we recommend strengthening this clause to explicitly:

- Affirm the inherent dignity and rights of those living with disability and limitations. We extend these principles to the usage, reference and terms of language used within the Bill, particularly referring to “disabled persons/people”. Dignity is first bestowed upon the person. A person should not be defined or subjugated by disability or limitation whether physical, mental or neurological. People living with disability are not a separate race of “disabled people,” but are often defined by their ‘belonging’ to communities e.g. Deaf Aotearoa, Blind Low Vision NZ etc
- Recognise the importance of whānau and community relationships
- Reference Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations

This aligns with CST principles of dignity and the common good and provides a strong ethical foundation for implementation.

Eligibility and Access to Services

We are concerned that eligibility criteria will become overly restrictive or primarily **cost driven**. From a CST perspective, limiting access risks undermining the preferential option for the vulnerable. From a Tiriti perspective, such limitations will disproportionately affect Māori. Unacceptably, half a million people with disabilities in Aotearoa have unmet needs in daily life, including 245,000 people lacking access to needed health professionals.⁴

We recommend:

- Transparent and equitable eligibility criteria
- Safeguards to prevent exclusion of those with high, complex needs or multiple diagnoses and disorders
- Mechanisms to monitor equity of access, particularly for Tāngata Whaikaha’ Māori

Person-Centred and Whānau-Centred Supports

³ Pope Francis. (2020, October 3). *Fratelli Tutti*. www.vatican.va. The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html n.107

⁴ Live.com. [Large-Print-copy-of-Disabled-people-need-more-care-and-support.docx](#)

We strongly support provisions enabling person-directed supports.

However, we encourage the Bill to more clearly recognise:

- The role of whānau, aiga, and community networks
- The importance of relational, cultural and spiritual wellbeing e.g. Te Whare Tapa Wha, Te Pae Mahutonga⁵

This reflects CST principles of subsidiarity and participation and aligns with Tiriti principles of participation and cultural recognition.

We recommend:

- Flexible funding arrangements
- Improved support for carers and whānau
- Culturally grounded service models, including kaupapa Māori approaches

Equity for Tāngata Whaikaha Māori

We urge a stronger focus on achieving equitable outcomes.

Current evidence shows Māori experience barriers in access, outcomes, and culturally appropriate supports. Addressing this is both a matter of justice and a clear Te Tiriti obligation.⁶ Pope Francis also teaches that “*there is no ‘other’ or ‘them’, there is only ‘us.’*”⁷ (FT 35) Equity for Tāngata Whaikaha Māori is not optional but essential to a just society. It is a harrowing fact that Māori with disabilities die from treatable conditions at nearly 10 times the rate of non-Māori and non-Pacific with disabilities.⁸ The percentage of Māori with disabilities having unmet needs is also unacceptably high with 72% of Tangata

⁵ Ingham, T. R., Jones, B. H., Perry, M. A., Sporle, A., Elliott, T., King, P. T., Baker, G., Milne, B., Diamond, T., & Nikora, L. W. (2025). *Māori Health, Wellbeing, and Disability in Aotearoa New Zealand: A National Survey*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22 (6). 829–829.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph22060829>

Durie, M. (1999, January). (PDF) *Te Pae Mahutonga: A model for Maori health promotion*. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/200830130_Te_Pae_Mahutonga_A_model_for_Maori_health_promotion

⁶ Ingham, T. R., Jones, B., Perry, M., King, P. T., Baker, G., Hickey, H., Pouwhare, R., & Nikora, L. W. (2022). *The Multidimensional Impacts of Inequities for Tāngata Whaikaha Māori (Indigenous Māori with Lived Experience of Disability) in Aotearoa, New Zealand*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19 (20). 13558. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192013558>
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9602565/>

⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, n.35.

⁸ *A Window on Disability | Health Quality & Safety Commission Te Tāhū Hauora*. (2026, June 5). Health Quality & Safety Commission Te Tāhū Hauora. <https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/resources/resource-library/a-window-on-disability/>

Whaikaha Māori living with at least one untreated, undiagnosed, underdiagnosed, or unmet need.⁹

We recommend:

- Explicit recognition of Tāngata Whaikaha Māori
- Māori leadership in governance structures (e.g. advisory or co-design bodies)
- Resourcing for Māori-led providers
- Regular public reporting on equity outcomes

This reflects CST's call to prioritise the vulnerable and Tiriti principles of partnership and protection.

Safeguards and Accountability

We welcome provisions for oversight and accountability but recommend refining both. Respect for human dignity requires robust protection against neglect, abuse, ignorance, inconsistency, and systemic failure.

We recommend:

- Independent monitoring mechanisms
- Clear and accessible complaints processes
- Transparency in decision-making and funding allocation

System Sustainability

We acknowledge the importance of sustainable funding and system integrity. However, sustainability must not override human dignity or equity. CST emphasises that **economic decisions must be judged by their impact on people, particularly the most vulnerable.**

We recommend:

- A long-term investment approach
- Prioritisation of early intervention and prevention
- Ensuring fiscal measures do not reduce access or quality of care

Conclusion:

We wish to reaffirm by our submission that we see, hear and deeply care about the lives and welfare of those living, caring, and working for people with disabilities in Aotearoa New Zealand. We envision disability legislation that shifts towards:

- Relational care (not just transactional services)

⁹ StatsNZ, *Disabled people need more care and support.*

- The active participation and voice of those living with disability in decisions affecting them
- Trust-based models, especially with Māori providers
- Real accountability for inequitable outcomes

As *Evangelium Vitae* affirms, “*The dignity of every human person is not lost even when that person is weak, suffering, or dependent.*”¹⁰ This Bill must reflect a vision of society where vulnerability is not a deficit but a shared human reality. This also envisions a disability system that is not only efficient, but just, humane and entirely inclusive. We are reminded that life: “*without vulnerability, without limits, without obstacles to overcome, there would be no true humanity*”.¹¹ In this way, our unity and life force is best found, not in our similarities, but in what makes us different and humanly unique.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II. (1995, March 25). *Evangelium Vitae: To All People of Good Will on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*. www.vatican.va; The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html n.99.

¹¹Pope Francis. (2022). *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* | EWTN. EWTN Global Catholic Television Network. <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/international-day-of-persons-with-disabilities-24808>