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This Bill amends the Social Security Act 2018 in order to implement 2 initiatives that improve financial assistance for caregivers that receive the orphan's benefit and unsupported child's benefit.

Caregivers in New Zealand provide day-to-day care for around 22,000 children whose parents are unable to care for them. Many caregivers are members of a child's whānau or extended family and have stepped up to take on the care of a child when their parents are unable to do this. The majority of children for whom these payments are made are Māori, and a significant proportion of their caregivers are also Māori.

Financial assistance for caregivers consists primarily of—

- the Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit, which are administered by the Ministry of Social Development, for children living with caregivers outside the State care system; or
- the foster care allowance, which is administered by Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children, for those caring for a child in State care.

The Bill makes amendments to the Act in order to implement 2 of the initiatives, which are—

- extending eligibility for the Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit to caregivers who may provide care for less than 12 months (by removing the 12-month rule); and
- extending the Christmas and birthday allowances to caregivers receiving the Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit at the same rates as those received by caregivers receiving the Foster Care Allowance.

Extending eligibility for Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit to short-term caregivers (removing the 12-month rule)

The Bill addresses this barrier by removing the minimum time period requirement for a caregiving arrangement to qualify for the Orphan's Benefit or Unsupported Child's Benefit and associated payments. The eligibility criteria for the Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit are outlined in sections 44 and 47 of the Act. This amendment will take effect for all new applications for the Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit on or after 1 July 2021. It will also apply to applications that have been made, but have not been decided under section 301 of the Act, before that date.

Extending Christmas and birthday allowances to caregivers receiving Orphan's Benefit or Unsupported Child's Benefit

Caregivers receiving the Orphan's Benefit or Unsupported Child's Benefit currently do not receive the birthday and Christmas allowances that are available to caregivers receiving the Foster care allowance

The Bill amends the Act to establish these 2 allowances for caregivers receiving the Orphan's Benefit or UCB at the same rate as for caregivers receiving the Foster care

allowance. The Bill adds the new allowances to Part 4 of Schedule 4 (for the Orphan's Benefit) and Part 5 of Schedule 4 (for the Unsupported Child's Benefit) of the Act. The Christmas allowance will start in December 2021 and the birthday allowance will start for birthdays in January 2022.