



21 January 2026

Tēnā koe

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your email of 9 December 2025, requesting information about any attempts to rewrite the Social Security Act 1964.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on your request set out below.

#### **1. What date did MSD's project to rewrite the Social Security Act 1964 (that lead to the Social Security Legislation Rewrite Bill 2016) start?**

Initial advice on this project was sent to the Minister for Social Development on 19 February 2013. Actual Cabinet agreement to rewrite the Act was obtained as of 24 June 2013.

#### **2. How many attempts were started to substantially rewrite the Social Security Act 1964 between 1985 to 2015 and the approximate dates of those efforts.**

1988 Omnibus Social Welfare Bill undertaken by Lester Mundell, Rob Brown, and Bridget Hornibrook

This project appears to have been instigated with a report to the Minister for the 1987 Budget.

A letter to the Minister dated 11 August 1988 confirms that the Minister asked the Department to begin work on an Omnibus Social Welfare Act, and that at a Cabinet meeting on 2 March 1987, a consolidation of the Social Security Legislation had been approved.

A report from 11 October 1989 indicates that "The Task Force which was set up by Cabinet on 22 August 1989 has prepared the attached report on a proposed income maintenance system based on the July Cabinet decisions." It proposed a Universal Benefit idea.

These "July Cabinet decisions" refer to a report which indicates that the Social Equity Committee agreed on 11 July 1989 that the Social Welfare Bill provide the legislative framework for a generic benefit system.

1995 rewrite undertaken by Chapman Tripp at the direction to the then Director-General, Margaret Bazley

A divisional Managers meeting note from 21 December 1993 shows that, on 9 December 1993, officials suggested a review of the Act included in the 1994

Legislative Programme. This would become the Social Security Legislation Review project.

An email from 6 December 1996 states that an agreement for Chapman Tripp to prepare draft legislation on what they would call the Income Support Bill was made as of 28 March 1995.

#### 2004-2005 rewrite project as part of welfare reform changes

It appears that this project began properly in February 2005, as part of the work towards the Future Directions Bill Phase 2.

A Cabinet paper states that the initial steps towards this rewrite attempt were made as of 3 May 2004. A related Cabinet minute for this paper states that "further benefit simplification is envisaged under the next stage of Future Directions", which supports the February 2005 approximate start date.

A report from 2008 shows a timeline which states that, on 1 August 2005, Cabinet agreed that the legislation providing for the introduction of the Core Benefit should also rewrite the Social Security Act 1964.

#### 2012 or thereabouts that lead to the Social Security Legislation Rewrite Bill 2016

A rewrite Bill was submitted for consideration in the 2012 legislation programme. Initial advice on this project was sent to the Minister as of 19 February 2013.

Resourcing for the rewrite was sought as of 12 April 2013. The paper seeking agreement to rewrite was sent to the Social Outcomes Committee on 31 May 2013.

On 15 June 2013, Cabinet agreed that the Social Security Act should be rewritten so that it was more coherent, accessible, readable and easy to understand, with the aim of introducing new legislation by December 2015.

#### Other attempts to rewrite

Apart from the four rewrites listed in your request, the Ministry located one additional attempt which was made around 2007/2008. This appears to have been a continuation of the work from 2004/2005 after it was deferred.

We would like to note that the 2008 attempt at rewriting the Act referred to a 'Social Support Bill' and the rewrite exercise in 2005/2006 proposed that the Act be renamed the 'Social Assistance Act'. You may consider these to be two distinct rewrites.

We also located some notes from the Divisional Managers meeting which states "In 1990 a review of the Social Security legislation was carried out and a number of desirable amendments were identified and included a Social Welfare (No 2) Bill." You may also consider this to be another attempt at a rewrite.

The Ministry reviewed a number of documents while looking to respond to your request. If you are interested in requesting any documents in relation to the rewrites, please reach out to us.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp.



Anna Graham  
**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**