

July 10th 2012



PO Box 1893
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Attention: Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees

To Whom It May Concern,

The Home Based Learning Network WA (HBLN) submit the following letter in support of the many single parents home educating their children across Australia in regards to the proposed amendment to the Social Security Legislation - Fair Incentives to Work Bill 2012.

While we appreciate that the government is trying to find ways to trim the budget in 2012-2013 and beyond, it is apparent that the current government has not fully considered the ramifications of these changes to an already vulnerable section of the Australian community.

All Australian families who choose to home educate their children bare total financial responsibility for their child's education as neither federal nor state budgets allocate funding for these students. The federal government's proposed changes will further heighten the financial difficulties of the many single parents that choose home education as the best option for their child. Many of these parents have children with special needs, in particular, children on the Autism Spectrum.

In many instances home education is the only viable option available to this group of parents. Presently, it is reported more than 1% of Australian school-age children have a confirmed diagnosis of Autistic Disorder or Asperger's Disorder. A recent submission to the WA State Government's Education and Health Standing Committee by Dr. Jasmine McDonald (an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of WA) highlighted the desperate need of these families citing the lack of suitable available facilities within the traditional school system and the rising incidence of home education as their only option:

"However, recent international, Australian and WA research has shown that students with intellectual and cognitive disabilities, including those with an ASD, often cannot access reliable and consistent mainstream inclusive practice that maximizes their progress over time (Ford, 2007; Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a, 2008b; Humphrey & Symes, 2010; MacDermott, 2008; McDonald, 2010; Shaddock, 2005; Shaddock, Smyth King & Giorcelli, 2007). Concerns have been raised about the lack of appropriate, individualized attention and support available, the high attrition rates and the inordinate degree of bullying experienced by students with an ASD in mainstream

settings (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Humphrey & Symes, 2010; Lynch & Irvine, 2009; MacDermott, 2008; McDonald, 2010). Additionally, such students often experience social isolation, anxiety and sensory difficulties in mainstream settings where their need for routine and predictability is often at odds with the chaotic, noisy happenings of mainstream school life, especially at the high school level (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008a; Symes and Humphrey, 2010).

*In response to these ongoing difficulties, **a growing number of parents in WA have been compelled to home educate their children with an ASD** (Appendix 2; Kidd and Kaczmarek, 2010; McDonald, 2010)."*

As president of HBLN I come into contact with families within this category on an almost daily basis and the toll upon them emotionally, mentally, physically, socially, and financial is immense, yet the love these parent bare their children sees them willingly endure many a sacrifice in order to secure the best outcomes for their children. While I admire and respect the many families within our community that choose to home educate, it is the single parents within this group that are most to be commended.

These parents who on a daily basis meet, not only the emotional, psychological, physical and health needs of their children (often with no outside assistance), but also their educational needs. In addition to which many of these same parents are seeking to better their circumstances by studying, or working part-time in addition to teaching and caring for their children.

It is this very group of vulnerable single parents, that in choosing to home educate their children, have already saved both state and federal government's money for school funding:

- Approx \$7,000 per primary school aged child per annum
- Approx \$12,00 per high school aged child per annum
- Approx \$90,000 per special needs child in high school per annum

Make no mistake that should the Australian Federal Government enact the proposed Incentives to Work Bill they will be directly responsible for inflicting new levels of financial hardship and emotional distress on an already fragile section of our community.

We therefore implore the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, at the very least, to find in favour of single parent families and reject the proposed changes and instead support these parents who ask for so little and give so much. We appeal to the government to increase funding to this section of the community beyond the \$60.00 a fortnight they are currently seeking to withdraw.

Yours sincerely

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