



AUSTRALIAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION

South Australian Branch

28 January 2009

Mr John Carter
Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into the provision of childcare

Current policy

Currently the childcare rebate is provided to parents for their use of childcare institutions. As such, this creates an ironic and bizarre situation where strangers are being paid to care for children, but parents are not. Why is this the case? One can only conclude from the childcare policy as it stands that the intention of government is to encourage women away from caring for children, leaving neither parent as primary care-giver.

What do women really want?

Some may argue that the current policy – which advantages working over stay-at-home mothers – has been implemented because that is what women want. The AFA submits otherwise. Research undertaken by Catherine Hakim found that 60-70 percent of women wish to structure work around the needs of their children, while only 10-30 percent are primarily career focused or work-centred.¹

Discrimination

The current childcare policy discriminates by providing tax benefits for working mothers with a lack of corresponding benefits to stay-at-home mothers. All mothers should be treated equally.

¹ Hakim, Catherine, *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2000

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Objective of childcare policy

The government should ask itself: what should the objective of childcare policy be? The AFA submits that it should be to give parents – who are in the best position to determine – a legitimate choice as to what care is best for their children.

What is to be done

Currently there is no level playing field. How can this be addressed? The easiest and most simple way of addressing the current discrimination against stay-at-home mothers is to redirect childcare payments directly to all parents. This way stay-at-home mothers are treated equally with working mothers. If what women really want – as, no doubt, some will insist – is to return to the workforce and have their children cared for, they can do so. Likewise, mothers who would prefer to be the primary care-giver to their children are then able to do so.

Other benefits

A policy of making childcare payments directly to all parents makes even more sense in the current environment, where the collapse of ABC Learning is causing tremendous problems for parents in sourcing care for their children. Many parents would see the implementation of such a policy as a welcome alternative.

Summary

Research shows that women prefer to structure work around the needs of their children; the current policy, which discriminates against stay-at-home mothers, is not aimed at facilitating this. A new childcare policy should be implemented whereby childcare payments are paid directly to parents for the care of their children, whether undertaken through a childcare institution or in the home.

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