

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Australia

Submission to the Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment (Small Business-Penalty Rates Exemption) Bill 2012

I am a permanent employee, working as a Registered Nurse, currently earning around \$38 per hour.

I have worked as a coal face Nurse for 35 years. During this period I have been required to work most weekends as well as many, or most public holidays. This also included frequent night shifts, often for week long stretches. The separation from my family and peer group has been significant, with frequent remarks of "we don't call you any more because you are always working" being predominant. The inability to attend the events of family milestones, which most would consider necessities, has meant times of disappointment and at times, friction, due the perceptions of younger members of the family, which are of poor consideration of them and their efforts and achievements. This is not simply something they "get over", but are part of the character building factors that require considerable effort to recover ground in

rebuilding of these relationships, and ensure that the personality building of younger family members is of a favourable nature, and one that will contribute to self, and society, rather than damaging them emotionally which often has the effect of creating poor functioning individuals who cost society, rather than contribute. Any question of these views can be clarified with the theories of Skinner, Piaget, Maslow, and many others.

The question of entitlement to penalty rates has multifactorial answers, with the first as compensation for family disruption as the often quoted sole reason, however, there are other, possibly stronger arguments for compensating workers for working shift work weekends and public holidays. These include the extra costs of supporting the family dynamics and personality development of younger members of the family, extra medical costs incurred by working evenings and nights in poor weather and inclement conditions. In my 35 years of Nursing, the majority has been within extended, open campuses, with poor to non existent heating or cooling, often in very cold conditions, with the expectations that you would simply "get over it". The result of this has been more frequent, and extended periods of illness, requiring increased medical costs. Further justification for the maintenance of penalty rates, and yes, even an increase of them, is the fatigue that this type of working generates, often resulting in much higher rates of depression in shiftworkers, earlier onset of aging processes, and unhealthier shiftworkers in older age. There is an abundance of research to support these views. These factors are clearly more costly for the individuals involved, as well as for their loved ones.

A factor that is not generally discussed is the fact that Nurses base rates are much lower than other service professions, which, without penalty rates, would place Nurses in a much lower wage group, discouraging the recruitment of newer nurses to this necessary profession, not to mention, the exodus of experienced nurses to more higher paid vocations. While this latter may complement the O'Farrell governments' drive to reduce nursing numbers, the longer term result will be much lower standards

of Nursing care, resulting in poorer outcomes for those in need. I support this claim re the O'Farrell governments drive with the Hunter New England Lower Hunter Divisions move to encourage redundancies and wages and conditions reduction which has occurred since the introduction of the O'Farrell governments mandate.

If penalty rates were abolished I would experience a considerable decrease of income. I would seriously consider exiting Nursing, and seeking other work in better paid positions. This may include working overseas, which would remove my taxable income from the O'Farrell governments income.

My weekends are important to me because after 35 years of isolation from society, I wish to re-establish my peer group in order to retire in a more functional and productive member of society, rather than become yet another costly statistic.

I urge the committee to keep penalty rates, and to consider increasing them, due to the poorly addressed needs of individuals, and the resultant cost to society and government that fragmentation of individuals to that society.

Submitted by

Jim Dow

Friday 28th of September 2012