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SUBMISSION TO SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017

RICE is a not for profit organisation with its primary aim being to provide accessible health, welfare, preschool education and development, childcare and a toy/resource library service to the children and their families in the remote and isolated areas of outback South Australia. RICE operates via an interdisciplinary team providing holistic services to promote children's and their families health, wellbeing, education and development. RICE services are provided to the South Australian pastoral stations and small remote communities. Staff travel by four wheel drive vehicles to the remote locations over 650 000 square kilometres. The RICE office is located in Port Augusta. RICE has been providing these services since 1976. RICE is sponsored by the Commonwealth and South Australian Governments. The Commonwealth funding is via the Budget Based Funding Programme.

The RICE submission is to ensure that children and their families in the rural and remote areas of Australia have the ability to access childcare and child development services as a fundamental right and that any proposed legislation must include the appropriate provisions.

The Budget Based Funding Program was established to reflect the diversity, population densities, remoteness, etc. and the need of children to access child care, health, wellbeing and education and development across Australia to ensure that the isolated children do not miss out.

I am of the opinion that the proposed legislation is not drafted to address the concerns of child care and child education and development in the rural, regional and remote areas of Australia.

Families living and working in the outback of South Australia deserve access to some form of child care albeit somewhat limited, compared to the metropolitan areas and regional centres.

Children living in the remote and isolated areas of Outback South Australia deserve services commensurate, or as much as possible, to children living in the metropolitan areas and regional centres.

Children and their families deserve some form of socialisation and wellbeing that are afforded to children and their families living in the metropolitan areas and regional centres? CaFHS, Councils and other organisations provide play days, children activities, parenting workshops etc. in the metropolitan areas and regional centres – why cannot similar services be provided to the children and their families in the remote and isolated areas of Outback South Australia.

Currently the RICE BBF mobile program provides the majority of these services but has been restricted from expanding these services due to the funding cap that has been placed on the BBF program for a number of years.

It appears that the Government and the Department are, at least for children living in the rural, remote and outback areas of Australia, dismissing world wide research that the earliest intervention for child

education and development results in significant long term gain for the children and their families and society in general, including economic benefits. This Bill provides benefits to children and their families provided they live in the metropolitan areas and regional centres but treats the children and their families in the remote and isolated areas of Outback South Australia as second class citizens. This is discrimination!!!.

BBF services are such an unique form and have been providing affordable, accessible, flexible and equitable child care, education and development in the rural, remote and isolated areas of Australia for many years. The BBF services cannot and should not be included as an add on to the child care subsidy reforms. They must be dealt with by implementing a strategy including policy and funding dedicated to the rural and remote areas of Australia, prepared and implemented by people who have a thorough understanding of the needs of rural and remote families together with the extreme difficulties such as communication limitations, remoteness, weather conditions, road closures, distances travelled, unique communities, diversity, isolation, etc.

Without such a strategy and dedicated funding, the organisations currently funded and the services they provide will cease.

Without the above strategy who is going to accept responsibility and tell the children and their families in the remote and isolated areas of Outback South Australia that the services that RICE provide namely child care, play days, creches, activity days, health, wellbeing, toy and resource library and preschool education and development will cease and none or very limited services will be provided. This is the consequences of the legislation in its current form.

Children and their families living and making their lives in the remote and isolated areas of outback South Australia deserve equal opportunities to their metropolitan and regional peers. The omnibus bill must guarantee that all families are treated equal.

Rob Kay
Executive Officer
27 February 2017