

Lisa Bryant

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Please accept the following as a submission to the Inquiry about the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Bill 2016, and the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Family Payments Structural Reform and Participation Measures) Bill 2016.

I am an advocate for access for early education for children and a journalist who writes about early education and childcare in Australia.

I do not believe the Jobs for Families Child Care Package Bill that is the subject of this Inquiry is in the best interests of Australian children for the following reasons:

- **The child care package's proposed activity test will reduce a lot of children's access to education and care:**
 - Children's access to early education and care will depend on their parent's activities.
 - Some children will have the amount of education and care they can access, reduced.
 - How many children will have reduced access has not yet been fully quantified.
 - This may make some education and care services unviable.
 - Parents in casual work will not know what their fees will be on a week to week basis.
 - The activity test is geared to giving children 6 hour slots of care. Some children will have access to whole day care, some won't.
 - This could be the first step towards funding parents for hours of care used only and/or the establishment of specific 6 hour services for low income families.

- **The child care package will result in a lot of program changes for little benefit:**
 - Aboriginal BBF services will lose the funding system developed for them in acknowledgment that the mainstream subsidy system would not suffice.
 - Support for services in 'thin markets' will be time limited and compliance heavy.
 - Any service funding (outside of parental subsidies) will be competitive grant funding.

- **The package does little to solve key issues with childcare in Australia such as:**
 - The ongoing and unwarranted separation between early education and care.
 - Undersupply of education and care services in some areas.
 - The lack of a planning mechanism for education and care.
 - Lower than optimal quality of education and care – with not enough early childhood teachers and too high ratios of children to educators.
 - Unliveable educators' wages and no pay parity between early childhood and other teachers' salaries.
 - Increasing corporatisation of education and care provision and a shrinking not-for-profit sector.

- **The package does nothing to establish the importance of early education for all children in Australia.** It doesn't lay the foundations for the development of a high quality, affordable and accessible education and care system for all children, with additional supports for children who need it most such as those with additional needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children from low income families and children at risk.

- **The benefits of the proposed changes are limited.**
 - Some families will be \$30 better off per week.
 - The parental subsidy system will be simplified.

In 2009 the Commonwealth and every State and Territory Government agreed on a National Quality Agenda for early childhood education and care to ensure that "by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves,

and for the nation.” This gave us the National Quality Framework which promised children would have access to higher quality early education and care delivered by more and more qualified educators.

The child care package being proposed via these bills delivers little other than \$30 per week cheaper ‘child care’ to parents who are working in paid employment.

I believe that the bill should not be supported unless the following changes are made at a minimum:

- Removal of the Activity Test. Currently all children have access to 24 hours of funded child care per week. The bill removes this.
- Removal of the plans to mainstream Aboriginal Budget Based Funded Services. Mainstreaming these services as per the bill will lead to the closure of services and the reduction of access to funded childcare by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Bryant

19th September 2016