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24th November, 2003
Phone:

The Secretary: Richard Selth
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Workplace Relations
"Increasing Participation of Older Workers"
Parliament House
Canberra

SUBJECT: Flexibility in Employment Conditions
for Older Workers blocked by Existing State Legislation

Dear Members of the Committee

I have enclosed a letter which I wrote in September last year, to my employer, the NSW Department of Education. The letter explains my personal situation. (I don't mind if you put it on the Website.) The letter illustrates the following points about older workers, particularly older workers who have had long experience in one field:

Experienced older workers **offer:**
rapid adaptation to a variety of work-sites (due to experience)
capacity to provide relief staffing
willingness to provide relief staffing (which young workers with children do not)

Older workers need:
income security (coming from the postwar generation)
a regular income stream
blocks of time off (to travel)
blocks of time off (for health/wear-and-tear)

Unlike younger people with families, older workers **do not need** a weekly routine, to fit in around kindy-gymn and music lessons for the kids. But we **do need** to be able to take off blocks of time for the things we long to do — mostly, travel. (And teachers do not really want to be forced to take trips only in school holidays, when everyone else is travelling.)

We also wish to be on a payroll, with a regular (though reduced) income.

However, in the NSW Department of Education, if you are a "permanent part-time" worker, you have to work so many days each week; you cannot work full-time for a period, then take time off. That commitment to work every week locks you in to the job, just as badly as if you were full-time.

I thought it made perfect sense to be permanent part-time, but be able to work in full-time blocks, as a relieving person. That also guaranteed my employment, and an income stream. I was prepared to work when the Department required, and organise my travel trips around it.

I also believed it would make more sense for an older person to be able to take off blocks of time for personal renewal. If one is starting to find it harder to work a full term, then arguably

a block of time is more useful as a break, than a couple of days a week, while still having to work the full term.

You can see how many people my submission went to; I also sent it separately to our Assistant Director-General of Education, who is in charge of the counselling service. However, the submission ground to a halt because "there is no such type of employment in the Education Act", I was told. Someone also suggested that it would make it harder for the Department if I had a car accident, to know if I was working at the time or not. That seemed ridiculous to me, because if they had instructed me to work during a particular period of time, they would have a record that I was on duty.

My application came to nought. Not only was I blocked by a state Act of Parliament, I received no interest in the idea from anyone. I didn't get replies to most of my letters; I had to chase them up by phone. So I have gone back to full-time work, and yes I am in a relieving position.

However, I have spoken to other colleagues of my age about the concept, and they are highly enthusiastic.

REQUEST;

Would the Committee please consider Federal legislation to make permanent part-time employment include the flexibility to request to work in full-time blocks, instead of a certain number of days per week?

Yours sincerely



Lenore Grunseli
School Counsellor
New South Wales

