

The Standing Committee on Family & Human Services,  
House of Representatives,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra ACT 2600

## SUBMISSION ON BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

1. There are many problems that men and women face in balancing work and family, but the sector of the Australian community who are most severely affected are the (approximately) 100,000 girls and women who each year feel they have to resort to abortion because of financial, social, career and education disincentives to starting families. These women feel they cannot start or add to their families because of such disincentives.
2. The numbers of these women are too high to be adequately dealt with by voluntary and church agencies, although these have done a valiant job with little or no government funding. It is clearly **in the national interest** for these women to give birth to the babies they have conceived, as apart from moral issues, Australia's economic interests are severely affected when the birth rate is below replacement level, cf the Treasurer's recommendation that couples should have three children: "one for the husband, one for the wife and one for the country". Our birth rate is now 1.7, which is well below what the Treasurer recommends. The experience of countries such as Japan and Germany - and even the USA - which are experiencing serious problems in paying their social security, pensions and health care costs because of low birth rates, make it even more imperative that the Australian Government adopt a pro-natalist policy. So far successive Australian governments have relied on immigration to boost our population, but as most of Europe now has a below-replacement level of births, and even countries such as Sri Lanka and Thailand reach zero population growth birth rates, the pool of available immigrants will vanish.
3. We therefore recommend that the Federal Government set up "Parenting Centres", possibly alongside Baby Health Centres, other Local Government facilities or near Public Hospitals, where trained counsellors will advise girls and women with unplanned pregnancies how they can continue with their pregnancies and their education, and/or how they can resume their careers after the births of their babies. Some schools are already arranging for pregnant girls to continue with their their education, but such programs need to be Australia-wide with hostels and interstate accommodation offered to students or adult women who find that for social or other reasons, they cannot remain in their home states or with their families.
4. The Parenting Centres should be equipped with ultrasound machines and technical support so that the mothers can view their babies on ultrasound
4. Wherever possible the fathers of the babies should be involved and encouraged to participate in the lives of their infants.
5. The Government should consider a system of 12-months paid maternity leave **with the essential proviso that the equivalent is offered to women who are not in the paid workforce or who do not wish to return to the paid workforce after giving birth.**

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6. Funding for 40 hours per week of childcare should be offered to all mothers or pre-school children, whether they are in or out of the paid workforce. This would in effect constitute a "mother's wage", and would relieve the severe economic pressures faced by families when the wife has to drop out of employment because of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. This funding would also enable one or both parents to better balance their work commitments with family life by easing economic pressures and facilitating decisions about part-time work, decreasing overtime and after-hours work, and/or one parent remaining out of the paid workforce while the children are preschool.
7. Some level of child care funding paid direct to mothers should continue after the children are at school (until the youngest child is aged 14) to enable one parent to be home after school hours or when children are ill, or to pay after-school child care costs. This will enable those mothers who have returned to paid work once their children are at school, to work part-time so they can be home after school hours or when the child/children are ill, or to make alternative care arrangements. There is evidence that some women seeking abortions are not young unmarried women but older, married women who become unexpectedly pregnant after having achieved their desired family size. **Australia needs these additional babies!**
8. For those women who wish to return to their careers after giving birth, counsellors at the Parenting Centres should help them work out a career pathway whereby this can be achieved.
9. Abortion providers should be prohibited - under severe penalties - from terminating the pregnancies of any girl or woman who cannot show that she has attended a counselling session at a Parenting Centre. The counsellors at Parenting Centres should not be neutral or "non-directive" but should be oriented towards helping a woman continue her pregnancy. Periodic audits of Parenting Centres should be undertaken to ascertain what success/failure rates they achieve.
10. Some program such as the United States CHIP program (Child Health Insurance Program) should be initiated by the Federal government to cover the health costs of pregnant women and their unborn children from the time the pregnancy is confirmed. The payments that a woman receives on giving birth (\$3,000 - \$5,000) should commence once the pregnancy is confirmed on an instalment basis. This would help encourage women who may not envision their unborn child as a reality, that the fetus is indeed a person valued by the nation.
11. While these recommendations may incur substantial costs, it is an economic imperative if Australia is to prosper or even survive as a free nation, that at least a population replacement level of births be achieved. The Australian Government very commendably found - apparently quite easily albeit unexpectedly - a billion dollars in aid to help the Indonesian province of Aceh following the tsunami disaster. We should be able to find at least double that amount to save the 100,000 babies needlessly lost each year in our own country.
12. We would appreciate the opportunity of making a verbal submission when the Inquiry holds public hearings in Melbourne.

Mrs. Babette Francis  
National & Overseas Co-ordinator  
21 April 2005