

**From:** Nicky Hurt [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 8 April 2005 3:04 PM  
**To:** Committee, FHS (REPS)  
**Subject:** Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family  
**Importance:** High

To the Secretary of the Committee,

Thankyou for allowing me to provide my opinion on this important issue. I will respond to each item separately. My comments reflect the opinion of a part time working mother of a child under 5 years.

### **1. Financial, career and social disincentives for starting families.**

I have a 2 year old son and work part time: 2 days as a research psychologist (a position I held full time prior to taking maternity leave) and another 14 hours/week helping to run my husband's construction company. We do not place our child in formal child care (see point 2 below) and rely on family members as informal child care options. We are fortunate to have these informal child carers as an option.

Financial disincentives - Unfortunately my husband and I suffer fertility problems and required IVF to conceive our son. The huge cost of this, without any guarantee of conceiving, was a significant disincentive for starting a family. I congratulate the Government for recently introducing the Medicare Safety Net rebate program as this has made our unsuccessful attempts for number 2 more affordable. However, further financial subsidies would be much appreciated.

As well, another financial disincentive is the loss of one income to rear a child. Living in Sydney with a large mortgage we so not have the luxury of being able to rely on a single income. Unless both parents work full time or there are no financial pressures on the family unit, most families are under pressure to find a way to financially support the single income earner.

Career disincentives - My career has plateaued since having my child but this has been my choice because I opted to return to work in a part time capacity. I feel it is very difficult in the current working climate for working women to continue to advance their career if they do not work full time. However, when both parents work full time (or a single parent works full time) this puts an enormous amount of pressure on themselves and on the family unit, and in my opinion, to the detriment of all (work, family, self). There is no "balance" when mothers of young children work full time.

Social disincentives - I don't perceive their to be any social disincentives to starting a family. Prospective parents who perceive social disincentives perhaps shouldn't become parents.

### **2. Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce**

This issue encompasses a range of issues. Firstly, the availability of quality, affordable child care. I have been on the waiting lists of several child care centres for 18 months and am unable to secure a position for my son. I made the mistake of not putting his name on lists when I first found out I was pregnant. There does not appear to be enough places for children under 2 years, or enough child care centres catering to this age group. There also does not appear to be fair and equitable enrolment system operating in some privately owned child care centres. Working parents should receive child care positions before non-working parents. Waiting lists are deceptive because they are often full of children's names who may never take a space in that centre.

As well, the cost of child care, particularly for parents of under 2 year olds acts as a disincentive for returning to work (\$80 per day in some private centres). One needs to be earning reasonable money to warrant the effort required to juggle both work and child rearing responsibilities. I would take home half of what I earned per day if I paid formal child care costs on top of my salary. Then I balance that with the loss of time spent with my son and the extra stress associated with being a working parent (e.g. needing to leave work at an earlier time to get home to pick him up from child care, what to do about care when he's sick etc.) and the costs associated with working (e.g. travel, clothing).

There needs to be other child care option available to parents - 24 hour centres operate for shift workers; financial incentives to use nannies; a greater number and variety of occasional child care spaces (we have one local council run centre that runs some half days - none of which are on the days I work!); more workplace-based child care centres; offering incentives for family members as informal child carers etc. etc. The government needs to undertake widespread consultation to explore more innovative and creative ways to solve the dearth of child care for under 5 year olds.

Another issue is that most women I know have been offered a full time position post-maternity leave or no position. There does not appear to be any flexibility among many employers (I believe my employer to be in minority). Those who take part time positions (me included), do so at the expense of their long term career path or end up doing a full time job in part time hours. There is no balance whatsoever!

Also, as the world of work is changing so rapidly, most women do not (if they can afford to) have the luxury of being able to take 5 years off from work to concentrate on child rearing responsibilities. I would no longer have a career after a 5 year non-work period, without significant retraining (at my cost), if I had chosen this path. I chose to return to work (1) because of financial pressures and (2) because of lack of long term career prospects if I didn't.

**3. the impact on taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life.**

I believe the Family Tax Benefit B is grossly unfair. While I support a payment for stay-at-home parents, I believe the Family Tax Benefit B should be means tested just as the Family Tax Benefit A is. Why should high single income earning families (earning \$100+K per year) receive benefits and middle income parents (earning \$80+K) with both parents working receive no government assistance! Where is the fairness of a "single income family" receiving government assistance when their total family income is significantly greater than a dual income family. This "flies in the face" of the government's long term plan to increase workforce participation, especially among women.

I hope this injustice is something that your government can give some thought to rectifying. The most logical one to me seems to put an upper limit on FTB part B payments. If it is set at a level that only the minority of the population earn eg \$100,000+K or even \$150,000+K then it should not affect the masses and cause too many "voter concerns".

As well as eliminating the inequity inherent in FTB part B, I'd suggest a huge incentive to get parents working and to support and recognise the important economic contribution of dual income families is to make child care expenses tax deductible. This is then a fair and significant incentive to get parents working and ultimately increase work force participation among women. Having said this, the infrastructure has to be in place to allow working parents to get their children quality, affordable child care. Offering a higher child care rebate (as per Howard's election promise) is only going to encourage child care centres to increase their fees.

I hope my opinions have been helpful.

Nicole Hurt