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Sent: Thursday, 24 March 2005 1:12 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Submission on balancing work and family

Balancing work and family

In writing a submission on balancing work and family I am tempted to become an economist and write a great dissertation. However being that I am not an economist I think it would be wiser for me to stick to desired outcomes and leave the economics to the economists.

I live in the suburb of Rowville which is one of the "nappy wash" suburbs with many young mothers and babies at the local shopping centre. Within a five hundred-metre radius of my home in Lambourne Avenue there are four childcare centres that I know about. But there is only one milk bar. So that in this era child care centres outstrip milk bars four to one.

The other thing is that I am semi retired and in our street during the working week there are few mothers at home during the week. In fact [REDACTED] is deserted during the working week. In one bizarre incident I was stopped by the police as a potential burglar.

Both of those facts tell us much about family life in the 21st century. It's normal for mothers to work. That wasn't the case when I was a kid in the 1950s.

I grew up in Surrey Hills in the 1950s. Childcare centres as we now know them were unknown but there were plenty of milk bars in Surrey Hills and, during the working week, many mother were home with their families (if not at school).

My main friend was unusual in that both his parents always worked and he was responsible for his younger brother during the school holidays. There was the danger that these boys could get up to mischief during school holidays without supervision. That is a common pattern these days with neither parent at home for the school holidays.

Let us go fast forward now to my time in St Kilda 1976 – 1996. In 1986 there was a girl over the other side of Moodie Place who was about 22 of Greek origin. Her father brought a guy out from Greece to marry her. I told the mother that if I got married I would need about 600 dollars a week to provide for all my obligations. The mother laughed in my face as if I were an idiot.

But three weeks later her attitude had changed very greatly. Her confidence in the future of her daughter and son in law had been shaken by the massive mortgage repayments for a basic house in Clayton for the young couple. Her husband was probably Labour but not for much longer. He was angry at the predicament in which he found his daughter. A repayment of \$800 dollars per month was absurd in 1986 when incomes were much lower.

So that Effe, the daughter, had to continue working and being a mother. She worked in the city and dropped her daughters at her mother's place on the way to the city. That went on for many years. Michael (the husband) worked for the Melbourne City Council 38 hours week and 20 hours per week at night cleaning offices. Effe worked 38 hours and Michael 58 hours. That is a bit of a hard grind for anyone surely. How much of their income went out in taxes is anyone's guess but judging by articles on family taxation it would have been almost half.

