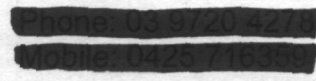



Ms. Susan Bentley

Vic, 

April 6, 2005

Chairman, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family &amp; Human Services.

Dear Chair,

I am a mother of 5 children aged, 21, 16, 7, 6, and 4 and, believe I am typical of many mothers. I also work part time, putting me in the 42% of all single mothers. I have experienced the difficulties of balancing a career and being a mother as both a married and a single mother.

My main concerns are:

- In 2001, when I was still married, I successfully applied for a position as a medical receptionist. I then found, after I put my children in childcare and lost my parenting payment and our income tax was adjusted, I was going to take home \$10.00 per week, after I paid for petrol, car maintenance and clothing, I was going to be worse off. I need not have worried because I had my name on 4 different childcare centre waiting lists for a full year without success. I then gained employment as a night fill attendant in the supermarket. Working nights was the only suitable employment I could find which eliminated the issue of childcare.
- I am now single because I left my marriage mainly due to domestic violence which puts me in the 40%, (according to a study by the AIFS), or (50% according to studies by the NCSMC). I have found my employment situation even more difficult.
- I am now studying full time to help me prepare to gain meaningful employment when my youngest child returns to school. I also work 2 nights per week in the supermarket and do housecleaning.
- My son is now attending counseling and the appointment times are varied. There are also meetings to attend with the school and Centrelink which are difficult to work into work hours.
- I am required to report to Centrelink once a fortnight to report my earnings. The requirements put on me by Centrelink are very frustrating in that I am required to tell them exactly what I earn before I receive my pay slip, in fact I was initially told I have to give my earnings up until midnight on Tuesday. I explained that I was in the middle of a shift on midnight Tuesday. If I have holidays or a night off sick or work overtime my pay is different and I am on various different hourly rates. It is very difficult to work out my pay until I get my pay slip. I find this rigid style of reporting frustrating and unnecessarily difficult.
- I was a member of a family violence support group for 3 years and I know one of the main concerns for many women hoping to leave the 'abusive relationship' was financial. Even after

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leaving the 'relationship' it takes a long time to recover without having to immediately think about finding employment. When my marriage ended I was diagnosed with 'post traumatic stress' similar to that of a Vietnam vet.

- I will soon have to quit my part time employment, (night fill in the supermarket) as my 16 year old son will be moving out to live with his father. This is mainly due to having better living conditions due to more money in the household and the fact that he finds the responsibility of looking after his siblings, (on the nights I am working, if I need to go to appointments, studying or shopping), tedious and tiring. I will have no-one to look after the children.
- Often women gain employment when the children's father has access, then he doesn't collect the children for access or, changes access with short notice. This places the mother in the position of not being able to meet work commitments. Many schools do not have an after school care facility and even fewer have a vacation care program.
- My children do not have access with their father; this leaves me with no time to myself, or time off ever. I don't go out socially, I rarely get time to watch television, play sport, attend meetings, or any other leisure activities. This is exhausting and very draining emotionally.
- I also struggle to find time to participate in school activities, which I believe are of great importance to my children. I have spoken to my local primary school and they assured me that the school "simply could not function without parent participation and support". Some of the areas which parents provide support are: reading in class, PMP programs, incursions, excursions, canteen, sports training, school camps, banking, collating of newsletter, the walking school bus program, supervision of swimming programs and sport days, fathers / mothers day stalls, fundraising, grounds maintenance, etc. I have participated in some, if not all of these activities at some point, and I would like the opportunity to participate in these events again when my youngest child starts school.
- In the media release dated 02/03/05 you compare women in the workforce with Sweden and the UK. I don't believe it is helpful or fair to compare without finding out how they achieve such high levels of workforce participation. I have spoken to someone who lived in the UK and she told me that due to so many people living in concentrated areas most women have family members or friends doing the child minding. I also know that many of my girlfriends here, (married or single) rely on family to help out with child minding.
- I am currently paying my mortgage on my own which puts me in the 40% of all single mothers, although I will have to sell my home when I quit my part time job as I could not afford the repayments. There is no assistance with mortgage repayments and we will then be in an already overburdened rental market. The proposed changes to the 'parenting payment single' concern me greatly. Since being on my own I have found life very difficult both economically and emotionally.

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- I believe parenting should be recognized as a worthwhile occupation. The government is now handing out cash incentives to have children. We are constantly told 'our children are most precious resource' but if you are a 'stay at home Mum' you are looked down on by society. I hear such comments as "so you don't work then". The judgments made toward single mothers are even worse. I don't believe women choose to be single parents.

I am in support of making changes to further increase women's participation in the workforce but believe any changes should be of a supportive, rather than a punitive nature. Studies have shown that working mothers has a positive effect on families, in particular children, only if their mothers are happy in their employment. If their mothers are only working in a job they don't like to meet some government requirement, it has a negative effect. Paid employment with primary school aged children is very difficult without family support, or suitable and reliable childcare.

I had my children because I wanted to raise them, not pay someone else to do it but, I have enormous pressure financially to gain employment.

Sincerely,

Susan Bentley