



From: Elise Burch [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, 7 April 2005 9:32 PM

To: Committee, FHS (REPS)

Subject: Submission due by 8 April 2005 - Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family

I really welcome the opportunity to forward my submission which I am hopeful addresses the Terms of Reference to be addressed by the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services.



We currently have two children in childcare 4 days a week at a cost to us of \$486.20 (having factored in the CCB deduction of \$37.76 for both children for 4 days). Whilst I work 3 days a week my job has invariably in the past, required me to be available more than the 3 days and whilst I am also completing a Postgraduate Certificate I have taken the days offered, being 4 days per week.

After accessing 9 months' maternity leave in 2000, I was fortunately able to negotiate with my employer to change my employment status from full-time to permanent part-time working 3.5 days per week from March 2001. This was my choice, but notwithstanding it has means a significant drop in take home income and also reduced leave entitlements as these are all now pro rated.

With the birth of my second child in 2004, I accessed 11 months' maternity leave and recently returned to the same employer on a permanent part-time basis of 3 days per week.

Both children have been born at a time when Government policy has changed or has just been about to change, so we did not receive any financial assistance for either child. Of course, we did not choose to have children to obtain a financial benefit, but it can't help but be an expensive time, and any meaningful assistance is always welcome.

Financial, Career and Social Disincentives

Financial Disincentives

- **Costs of childcare** are almost prohibitive. My husband and I are fortunate to earn good money but from the figures I've quoted above we outlay a large amount of money each week for our children's care. The reasons for childcare are many and varied. It can range from simply wishing to return to the workforce; financial independence; to lessen the "breadwinner" burden on partner; to meet costs of mortgage and importantly to retain skills to endeavour to remain employable. Not everyone has access to family to ease the financial burden. I cannot comment for those who are from a single income family but can only wonder how they might manage.
- **Reduced or loss of income** if a parent remains at home as primary carer or reduces working hours.
- **Cost of actually having a child** – we elected to use a private obstetrician working out of a public hospital primarily due to my age and previous complications. Although we have private health insurance we were out-of-pocket approximately \$6,000. Whilst there is

some adjustment when you submit your income tax return, because you are over the Medicare \$1,000 threshold, we were still significantly out-of-pocket.

- **Childcare places almost non-existent - Living off Savings** – we were unable to manage on one income during this last period of maternity leave. This is largely because in order to be able to return to work and also to ensure that we were able to reserve a place for our youngest child we had to continue to pay childcare fees for our eldest child for the full period I was on maternity leave. Unlike in my mother's era where she was able to take me out of childcare when she had my brother, if you did that now you would simply lose your spot and it's virtually impossible to secure another childcare place.

Career (and Social) Disincentives

- Motherhood is not necessarily seen as a good thing in a corporate or social environment. There are still a large number of individuals who subscribe to the view that work and family should be kept entirely separate. The more enlightened individuals in management are those who are familiar with work and family issues and I'd suggest, particularly men (I say men as the statistics still show that men hold the majority of senior and often middle management roles) who have children and whose partners work. Work and family issues are only forefront on a company's agenda in good times they certainly fall off the radar in bad times.
- You have to work extra, extra hard to prove yourself. To prove to your employer that having had a child you have not lost focus. This is particularly so, I would suggest if you have gone from full-time to part-time work. You tend to make yourself available at times outside of your scheduled hours so that you are not labelled as being "part-time so therefore part-time commitment".
- Often you put up with less meaningful work; below your level of expertise and capability because you feel you should be eternally grateful that you have been permitted to work on a part-time basis and you know how near impossible it is to obtain a part-time role as a senior specialist and dare I say it, you need the money.
- The lack of meaningful part-time or job sharing opportunities. Many women are not comfortable after having children returning to work on a full-time basis. Despite many corporations receiving "family friendly" accolades, women who work within these often large organisations know that it very much depends on who your individual manager is as to whether you will truly be able to access the family friendly policies such as part-time work. Also as the law in this area is "fuzzy" managers when asked whether they have to provide part-time work want to know the legal position and if it's not a legal requirement then invariably it's all too hard and they won't provide part-time work.
- If you are a parent you cannot always work extended hours – you need to drop off and collect children and this is very much dependent upon the hours of operation of the childcare centre and also the fact that little children are people who need to go to bed reasonably early and need to be fed and bathed – they cannot always be expected to "just fit in". We have created a society where motherhood/parenthood is not particularly valued.
- I know many women whose positions have been restructured whilst on maternity leave – it is positioned as a valid restructure and the person is retrenched. Let's face it, it's not the individual manager's money so often there is no real scrutiny of these decisions. Too often the woman accepts her plight and it is justified as "well the extra money will come in handy for her".

Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce;

1. Whilst this will be considered controversial I really think we need to mandate part-time work as a right for individuals returning from parental leave at least up until the child's second year at primary school. I can never understand why part-time work until the child is two is considered to be a solution. Many women take parental leave for the full 12 months so we're really only talking about part-time work for another year and that still falls within the 0-2 year category where childcare places are hardest to come by. I think more than anything, parents want access to meaningful part-time work.
2. Provision of greater number of childcare places so that parents have greater flexibility and access to places.
3. Some form of taxation relief for childcare fees.
4. A real recognition that work and family is not just a women's issue it is a family and society issue of great importance.
5. An education programme for our most senior business leaders about what it really means to be part of two parent working family where mum is not at home 5 days a week and the impact that has on day to day life. Often people in positions of authority who have the ability to change a company's culture may not have a great appreciation of what the issues are and may not think it really matters, having been brought up in a very different era where 2 income families were not as common as they are now.
6. Access to childcare at or near to workplaces.
7. Reduce the out-of-pocket expenses incurred when having a child.
8. Paid parental leave.
9. Positive media stories/campaigns about the health and other benefits of family life, rather than the negative (some may say realistic) stories which focus on the fact that if you choose and are fortunate enough to be able to have children you'll be broke until they leave home which in Sydney won't be until they're about 30!

The views expressed are mine alone and whilst many of my comments are based on what I've picked up anectdotally I know that they are also shared by many of my friends; women in my mother's groups and our partners.

I am really passionate and committed to this issue. If I can assist in any way I would be happy to do so. I welcome hearing from you.

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