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30th May 2014

The Hon Sussan Ley MP
Assistant Minister for Education
Federal Parliament
Canberra, ACT

Dear Ms Ley,

We are writing as a group of concerned parents from a group of small rural kindergartens in Victoria. Our kindergartens are based in Willaura and Lake Bolac and we are part of a regional cluster management network based in the Grampians. Our kindergartens are run by a dedicated group of parents who operate the parent committee and we are personally responsible for fundraising to make up the shortfall between state and federal funding and the costs of operating our kindergarten.

Our communities are remote and disadvantaged; most of the parents who run the parent committees also work part or full time on family run farms or in town to ensure off farm income. We are not professional fundraisers or a group of wealthy landowners; the children in our kindergartens come from a variety of backgrounds.

Three years ago when we were asked to increase our hours to 15 hours per week we were severely challenged by the costs. It would have involved anywhere from \$30,000 to \$50,000 additional fundraising to implement the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education program. Fortunately, the provision of interim funding by the state government for small rural and regional kindergartens in Victoria allowed us to implement the program with no additional financial pressure on parents, and thus the last three years have been some of the most enjoyable three years our kinder has experienced in recent years.

The removal of the stress of fundraising to keep the lights on and pay our teacher has added to the joy of kindergarten for our parents and families and especially for the children. The first group of children, who really benefitted from the program implemented in 2013, are now in Term 2 of their prep year at school and the results have been amazing.

It is therefore with great fear and trepidation that we approach the coming year. As you are aware the national funding agreement that guarantees children access to 15 hours per week of preschool or kindy is under threat.

The early years of our children's lives are the most formative years for their intellectual, emotional and social development. Taking away kindergarten funding that has been promised deprives our children of the education they need to get them ready for school.

Your press release of May 13, 2014 asserts that the Abbot government is committed to making child care more flexible, affordable and accessible. Surely part of this commitment is a strong, robust and secure Early Childhood Education program. For our children to be able to contribute successfully to a skills based world economy we need secure and robust education that starts in the year before formal schooling.

Our children and our communities need our kindergartens to be a secure environment, so that their first experience of formal education is a happy and enlightening time; not an experience overtaken by the stress of fundraising campaigns to raise tens of thousands of dollars just to keep the doors open and the lights on. Our committees consist of 5 to 8 families in communities of 300 or less, fundraising to this level is not sustainable and the loss of our kindergartens will destroy our communities.

We are not politicians or lobbyists, we are a group of concerned current and former parents of a small, rural and regional Victorian communities and voters. We are used to putting our hands in our pockets, to volunteering and to putting in as much time as we can to better our community. However we feel as Australians that we require our government to ensure the education of our young people is in a secure and stable environment and the provision of funded kindergarten for 4 year olds is a keystone to that.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Kumnick

on behalf of: Willaura & District Kindergarten and Lake Bolac & District Kindergarten

Attached: community petition in support of this letter