

5th September, 2014

To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed amendments to the Australian childcare system. I am a mother of 3 small children, and I work full time. We have used 5 different childcare centres and have had an au pair for a period of time. I will begin with my argument against changing the costing support structure, and then comment on my experiences about quality of care with all of the above.

Australia has legislation designed to protect women from discrimination (see Sex Discrimination Act, 1984 26(1)) as well as enforcing workplaces to support women to succeed in the corporate world through the Affirmative Action Act (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) 1986.

The proposal to cut the Child Care Rebate (CCR) would be contrary to the intent of the aforementioned pieces of legislature. If the cost of childcare was not subsidised to an affordable level (i.e. not 30% scaled to 0%), women who work full time, and particularly those striving to break the "glass ceiling" (see list of references for further reading), would be pressured to cease work, or reduce to part time work. This would cease any career progression for the women involved.

If the CCR is salary capped, there is no longer any incentive for the female partner to climb the corporate ladder and earn more money. In fact, there is a disincentive for them to increase their income, and therefore employment level. This has been noted by the Irish Independent (2013), who stated that childcare costs are the new glass ceiling preventing women from participating and thriving in the workforce.

As much as society may demand equality between the sexes, females remain the primary caregiver by default (Pocock, 2003). Pocock states that women who work full time, still retain the majority of the workload in the home as well. A woman's work usually suffers more because they are the first phone call when a child is sick. Their work generally has a lower remuneration and therefore would be the most vulnerable to changes in child care costs. Because of the various roles that females take on, as well as the glass ceiling, women are already predisposed to be discouraged from progressing in the workforce.

Men still have higher career prospects, and earning potential, than females. If you introduce a salary cap for child care, it becomes a decision of whether or not the couple are better or worse off if the female works. It should not be so. Females should be supported to achieve successes in line with the intent of the Affirmative Action Act and the Sex Discrimination Act.

This is an international human rights issue to which Australia subscribes, "...Parties to the International Covenants on Human Rights have the obligation to ensure the equal right of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights"

(<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/cescr.aspx>)

Personally, I have had 3 children in childcare at one point in time. At over \$70 per child per day, the cost of childcare was more than \$210 per day. Working fulltime, the cost was over a thousand dollars per week. How many people are able to justify that cost against a female's income? Add in the fact that those women who do manage to climb the ladder usually have a trail of HECS / HELP debts along the way that need to be repaid. If we did not have the CCR, I would not have been able to work. In fact when we reach the cap of \$7500 p/a (previously just over \$7800 but reduced by the Rudd Government), I have to use my leave and extended family to help look after the children instead of daycare for the final month. We then run the risk of losing our place in daycare because we have to un-enroll the children and then re-enroll in the following financial year.

I am a professional. I wish to participate, and importantly thrive, in the workplace. I do not wish to be discriminated against because of this.

My first child was on the waiting list for the childcare next to my work for 3 years. In the meantime, I jokingly quipped that if I left my husband, I would be progressed up the list – because being a single parent meant that I would be one of the 'priority' people. Childcare priorities should be for people who work, followed by people who study. I have known too many people who don't even work or study take up childcare places for less than \$20 per child per day so they can go out and have coffee with their friends. We should be encouraging women to progress and thrive in the business world. If they choose to stay at home to look after their children, that is absolutely fine, but they do not need daycare. If they need additional support or respite for special needs children, they should be recognised under a separate scheme. Parents who are students and employees should be supported in furthering themselves, especially in line with the Affirmative Action Act.

The standard of care/education, and equally as importantly food, between different daycare centres as well as an au pair, was astonishing. Children socialising in an environment where there is a smaller group with caring and interested 'Educators' is very different from a person who is on their phone or laptop while the children are left to play. In a similar vein, the paperwork that is required is detrimental to the learning and attention the 'educators' are able to give the children. I understand the purpose of documenting things for the sake of having something to audit, however there seems to be an excessive amount of work, and penalties for parents not reading and commenting on the paperwork. That discourages attentive care of the children.

In summary, the number of hurdles that women face in the workplace is large, and decreasing the support that the CCR provides would cripple the careers of many women. It would prevent them from participating in the workplace, and will limit career progression for females with children. The Affirmative Action Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, as well as the International Human Rights covenant indicate that Australia should be supporting females in the workforce, rather than penalising them for striving for success. Women who work should have priority for childcare, and supports should be removed for those who do not have a legitimate need for childcare.

Thank you for your consideration.

Further reading:

Childcare costs are new 'glass ceiling' for women (2013, Dec 05). *Irish Independent*

King, L. V. (2012). *What is the Lived Experience of Becoming a Parent as Described by the Working Professional Woman? A Heuristic Inquiry*. Order No. 3509158, Capella University.

Newman, M. (2008). Economists confirm existence of glass ceiling for women academics. *The Times Higher Education Supplement : THE*, (1838), 11.

Pocock, B. (2003). *The work/life collision*. Sydney: The Federation Press

The glass-ceiling index; Women and work." *The Economist* 8 Mar. 2014: 70(US). *Academic OneFile*. Web. 1 Sept. 2014.

The unshattered glass ceiling. (2008, Sep 05). *The Independent*.

Veale, C., & Gold, J. (1998). Smashing into the glass ceiling for women managers. *The Journal of Management Development*, 17(1), 17-26.
