

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION IN RELATION TO FUTURE OPTIONS FOR DELIVERING CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

MY NAME IS NICHOLAS HOUSTON. I OWN A SMALL BUSINESS THAT EMPLOYS ABOUT 10 STAFF. I AM ALSO MARRIED AND A FATHER OF A 2 AND 3 YEAR OLD.

I AM INTENSELY CAUGHT BETWEEN MY OBLIGATIONS AS A PROFESSIONAL AND EMPLOYER, AND COMMITTED PARENT. THE EXPERIENCE OF MY WIFE AND I IS THAT THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS INFLEXIBLE AND EXPENSIVE AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ESTABLISHED TO MEET MY NEEDS AS A PARENT AND EMPLOYER.

IN MY SUBMISSION I SUGGEST THAT STATE EDUCATIONS SYSTEMS SHOULD PROVIDE THE CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING SERVICES, AND THE PLETHORA OF PRIVATE SECTOR AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDERS SHOULD BE ABSORBED BACK INTO THE STATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS.

I EXPLAIN HOW IN THE CASE OF MY WIFE AND I, WE ARE BEING MADE TO PAY FOR SERVICES WE ARE NOT RECEIVING, AND SUGGEST THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE POLICY IS SET TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PROVIDERS RATHER THAN PARENTS AND EMPLOYERS.

I WOULD HOPE THIS SUBMISSION IS NOT A WASTE OF MY TIME.

SUBMISSION SUMMARY

STATE BASED PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS SHOULD BE EXTENDED BACKWARDS TO COVER THE CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT. FOR-PROFIT PROVISION OF SERVICES IN THE CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE PHASED OUT.

TOTAL COMMONWEALTH FUNDING OF THE SECTOR (INCLUDING REBATES AND THE COSTS OF ADMINSTRATING REBATES AND REGULATING THE SECTOR) SHOULD BE PAID DIRECTLY TO STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS TO FACILITATE THE INCORPORATION OF CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INTO STATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS.

BACKGROUND

CHANGES IN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S ROLES IN THE FAMILY AND IN GENDER EXPECTATIONS IN RELATION TO WORK OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS HAVE CREATED A NEED FOR CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING SERVICES.

THIS NEED IS NEW, HISTORICALLY.

IN THE PAST GENERAL PUBLIC EDUCATION PRODUCED TWO OUTCOMES, THE FIRST BEING THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN, AND THE SECOND BEING THE FACILITATION OF PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE.

BOTH OF THESE OUTCOMES CONTINUE TO BE VITAL TO THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY.

THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS NOT MEETING THE NEEDS OF PARENTS OR EMPLOYERS AND NEEDS STRUCTURAL REFORM.

NEEDS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS NOT MEETING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES. ARRANGEMENTS IN RELATION TO CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ARE LESS THAN SATISFACTORY.

CHILDCARE IS EXPENSIVE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND PLACES OR CHANGE ALLOCATION OF DAYS, AND THE REBATE SYSTEM IS CUMBERSOME AND HEAVILY ADMINISTRATIVE.

IN MY CASE, THE COST AND RIGIDITY OF THE CURRENT CHILD CARE SYSTEM MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR MY WIFE TO RETURN TO WORK EVEN ON A PART TIME BASIS. WE CANNOT READILY ACCESS ADDITIONAL DAYS OF CARE DUE TO THE ESSENTIAL UNDERSUPPLY OF PLACES AND THE CENTRE'S SCHEDULING PROCEDURE.

FOR EXAMPLE, MY WIFE AND I WERE OFFERED A PLACE AT THE LOCAL CHILD CARE CENTRE FOR OUR CHILDREN, AGED 1 AND 2, ON MONDAYS. MONDAY IS A QUIET DAY IN THE CHILDCARE WORLD NOT MUCH LOVED BY OTHER PARENTS. WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ACCEPT THIS DAY IN THE HOPE THAT OTHER DAYS WOULD BECOME AVAILABLE.

OUR CHILD CARE CENTRE CHARGES A FEE OF \$100 DOLLARS A DAY PER CHILD. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT COST ON OUR FAMILY BUDGET EVEN AFTER THE REBATE. HOWEVER, THE CENTRE ALSO HAS A POLICY OF CHARGING PARENTS FOR PUBLIC HOLIDAYS EVEN THOUGH THE CENTRE IS CLOSED. IN 2013 THERE WERE SIX PUBLIC HOLIDAYS THAT FELL ON A MONDAY, AND THIS MEANT WE PAID \$200 DOLLARS (LESS THE REBATE) ON SIX OCCASIONS WHILE RECEIVING NO CHILD CARE SERVICE.

I AM SELF EMPLOYED IN A SMALL BUSINESS THAT SUPPORTS 8 OTHER WORKERS. I FREQUENTLY HAVE TO WORK PUBLIC HOLIDAYS. ON THESE DAYS I HAVE TO PAY MY STAFF FOR THE PUBLIC HOLIDAY AND ALSO PAY FOR THE COST OF CHILDCARE EVEN THOUGH NO SERVICE IS PROVIDED. MY WIFE AND I HAVE TO PAY FOR A SERVICE WE DO NOT RECEIVE AND ALSO MAKE ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS.

THIS IS NOT SATISFACTORY BUT AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE SYSTEM MEETS THE NEEDS OF THE PROVIDERS BEFORE MEETING THE NEEDS OF PARENTS OR EMPLOYERS.

OTHER ISSUES

THE AGE A CHILD FINISHES EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (AGE 4) AND ADVANCES INTO STATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS IS ARBITRARY FROM MY PERSPECTIVE AS A WORKING FATHER.

THE DIFFICULTY OF LOCATING CHILDCARE PLACEMENTS, NEGOTIATING FEES INCLUDING BEING MADE TO PAY FOR SERVICES THAT ARE NOT PROVIDED AS DESCRIBED ABOVE, AND INTERFACING WITH THE BUREAUCRACY OF THE REBATE SYSTEM ENDS WHEN THE CHILD TURNS 4 AND ENTERS THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

THIS IS AN ARBITRARY AGE FOR THIS TRANSITION AS THE ISSUES FOR WORKING PARENTS, BEING THE QUALITY OF AGE APPROPRIATE EDUCATION AND THE FACILITATION OF OUR ABILITY TO GO BACK TO WORK, ARE THE SAME WHETHER YOUR CHILD IS 1 OR 5.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PERIOD AND THE EDUCATION PERIOD IS ARTIFICIAL.

THE PROPOSAL TO FUND NANNY'S WILL DO NOTHING TO RESOLVE THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEMS OF THE SYSTEM.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES

I AM ALSO CONCERNED THAT CURRENT POLICY IS NOT DIRECTED EXCLUSIVELY AT THE NEEDS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN BUT AT THE NEEDS OF THE PRIVATE CENTRE OPERATORS. THIS DUAL PURPOSE DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN EFFICIENT USE OF COMMONWEALTH RESOURCES.

I AM CONCERNED THE CURRENT MODEL IS WASTEFUL OF FUNDING IN THAT IT:

- DUPLICATES ADMINISTRATION COSTS ACROSS A NUMEROUS SMALL COMMUNITY AND PRIVATELY OWNED CENTRES
- SUPPORTS PROFIT MARGINS IN PRIVATE CHILDCARE CENTRES
- RESULTS IN VARIABLE QUALITY OF CARE
- IS ONLY VIABLE IN ITS CURRENT FORM BECAUSE OF EXTENSIVE REBATES PAID TO PARENTS THROUGH A HEAVILY BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM
- REQUIRES UNNECESSARY EXPENDITURE ON THE REGULATION OF A MIXED SECTOR.

THIS MODEL ABSORBS MONEY AND ENERGY THAT SHOULD OTHERWISE BE AVAILABLE TO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR.

IT WOULD BE A FAR BETTER USE OF RESOURCES IF COMMONWEALTH MONEY SPENT ON CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING REBATES, RELATED ADMINISTRATION, AND THE COSTS OF REGULATING PRIVATE SECTOR OPERATORS, ETC., WAS PAID TO STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS TO PROVIDE THE SERVICES THROUGH THEIR EXISTING STATE EDUCATION FUNCTIONS.

SUBMISSION CONCLUSION

STATE BASED PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS SHOULD BE EXTENDED BACKWARDS TO COVER THE CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT. THIS WOULD BETTER MEET MY NEEDS AS A PARENT AND EMPLOYER.

TOTAL COMMONWEALTH FUNDING OF THE SECTOR (INCLUDING REBATES AND ALL ADMINISTRATION COSTS) SHOULD BE PAID TO STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS TO FACILITATE THE INCORPORATION OF CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INTO STATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS.

THANK YOU