

To whom it may concern,

I wish the committee to understand that it is very difficult to access childcare, and that should one be successful in obtaining care, it is very hard to obtain full time care. I have also sent this letter to my local council so that they are aware of my experiences. I would like it to be noted that there are insufficient childcare places available. My baby was born in June last year and I am still trying to get her in to full-time childcare. I live and work in North Balwyn and I have applied for centres in North Balwyn, Balwyn, Ivanhoe East, Bulleen and I have been advised by friends and other parents to look at Rosanna and Templestowe as suburbs potentially having places.

There are three points that I wish to make:

1. Some centres accept non-existent children onto their waiting lists.

I specifically mean ones that have not even been conceived yet. For example, I put my child down on a waiting list at the council run centre closest to my work, a distance of 2.4km, after she was born (26 June) last year for a place at the end of January this year. My application was received in July. When I rang later in the year to inquire about whether or not I was successful, the person on the phone explained to me that I would have had to have put her down on the waiting list prior to October 2012 in order to obtain a place for January 2014. When I remarked that I wasn't even pregnant at that stage, the person told me that that was what women were doing. This particular childcare centre advertises that it gives preference to the children of parents who live and work in the area and are single parents. I meet all three criteria and yet women who are NOT EVEN PREGNANT YET receive preferential treatment by being allowed to enter the list above parents who actually have a child that requires care. In another centre in a neighbouring suburb I was advised that there was an 18 month wait to get into their centre. How can there be an 18 month waiting list for a baby room unless this centre also accepts applications from women who are not yet pregnant? I do wonder how widespread this practice actually is.

2. Full time care is more difficult to obtain than part time care.

This occurs despite, or perhaps because, centres generally offer discounts for full time care so that five days care costs almost the same as four days care. What this means is that children are forced to attend several centres which creates difficulties for the child and must have an effect upon their healthy development. There should be more oversight.

3. Conditions in some childcare centres are variable and some are not appropriate.

I attended a childcare centre within a few kilometres from my work for a visit. It was a very cold day and the children's area was terribly cold and no heating was evident. I was surprised to discover that there was no baby room; instead 16 children aged from zero to three years were housed together in the same area. This was unusual, as every other centre I had visited keep the toddlers in a separate room from the babies. In contrast, the childcare centre on the closest to it which I visited on the same day was lovely and warm and the babies had a dedicated area. Unfortunately, this second centre had no vacancies.

In sum, I hope that the committee can provide recommendations which will ultimately assist parents to access high quality childcare on a fulltime basis which is also at a reasonable cost.