



Police Federation
of Australia

The National Voice of Policing

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31 January 2014

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
The Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the **Productivity Commission's Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Public Inquiry**. The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) is the national body representing the professional and industrial interests of Australia's 57,000 police officers, across all jurisdictions and has almost 99% membership density. The PFA is a federally registered organisation under the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009.

The unpredictable nature of policing work and the difficulties it poses for police who are parents is unique. Policing requires complete commitment 24hrs a day, 7 days a week, for 365 days of every year. Whilst this is true of some other emergency services and shift work industries, there is unpredictability faced by Police that is not faced by any other type of worker in Australia. The round-the-clock demands of policing mean that police need childcare outside the standard 9-5 hours, and away from the normal bricks-and-mortar model of centre-based childcare. Balancing work and family commitments remains difficult for many of our members.

Workforce participation

Adequate child care needs to be available to allow police to be both parents and police. Participation of women in the police force is extremely low compared to female participation rates in the Australian labour market at large. The number of sworn female police officers nationally as at 30 June 2013 was just over 16000 or 27%. While female participation rates in the overall Australian population reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for 2012-13 was 65.2%. (ABS 4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia, Aug 2013).

The greater numbers of younger female police officers and the lower incidence of female officers with children indicate that as women start to bear children they tend to leave the police force. The relatively low rate of part-time employment in the police force also supports this conclusion (¹Police at Work, Wave 2, p.43). According to The Australian Bureau of Statistics the National proportion of women employed part time in the general population for 2012- 2013 was 43.3%. (ABS 4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia, August 2013). The fact that approximately 8% of members of the police service across Australia work part time² (more than 70% of that figure being women), compared with the 56% of members that have children shows that the demands of policing does not bend to the demands of parenting.

The current model of 9 to 5 childcare does not match the needs of policing families and is impacting on careers. According to *The Police at Work Report* (a survey conducted by the University of Sydney for the PFA) a large proportion of female officers did not seek promotion in the police force because the conflict with domestic commitments would make performing those higher duties impracticable³. Further to this the *Police Association of New South Wales Part Time Workers Survey* found that 19% of part time officers felt that resigning was an option they considered other than part-time work in order to meet their carers responsibilities⁴. The same survey showed that out of an overall 674 responses, 507 (75%) police surveyed indicated that by working part time their access to training opportunities, relieving and promotion had been reduced⁵.

Many policing parents (mainly women) have to work part time not because they want to but because current childcare services do not match their working patterns. *The Police at Work Report* found that 76% of police are happy with the hours they work, and only 23% want to work less⁶, a large proportion of those 90% of members changing to part time do so because childcare options are unavailable leaving many women in the force to have to choose between career and family.

Need for a more flexible affordable and accessible model of childcare

Due to the dynamic nature of policing, working patterns can change at a moment's notice. Rosters are rarely consistent over an extended period of time; the shifts an officer is working one fortnight may be completely different the next fortnight. In Victoria for example, 88% of officers have fortnightly rosters⁷, meaning they can only plan their childcare needs two weeks in advance, which for most childcare services, is not enough notice to secure a place when competition for places is high in the majority of childcare centres. Even within a single roster, 58% of officers work rotating shifts (a mix of day, night, weekday and weekend shifts)⁸, which makes finding an appropriate and consistent childcare provider extremely difficult. A NSW

¹ Police at Work, Wave 2, p.43

² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census Data

³ Police at Work Wave 4 Report p31

⁴ Police Association of NSW, Part Time Survey

⁵ Police Part Time Workers Survey 2008 p2

⁶ Police at Work Wave 5 Report p13.

⁷ Police at Work Wave 1 Report p24.

⁸ Police at Work Wave 1 Report p26.

Police Childcare Needs Survey resulted in 85% of NSW Police survey responders stating a desire for a childcare service more compatible with their work schedule⁹.

Members with carers responsibilities are left with little choice but to work part time or resign as childcare services do not enable them to continue full time policing. A survey of NSW Police working part time indicated that 90% of members who change to part time work do so in order to care for children¹⁰. The recent *Police at Work report* indicated that 52% of police officers with dependent children stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that work interfered with their responsibilities outside of work, compared with only 41% of officers without dependent children¹¹. In the *Police at Work Report*, 13% of those officers that resigned from the police directly stated that family commitments or an inability to fit working hours around caring responsibilities was the reason they resigned, and a further 36% stated that 'unsatisfactory working arrangements' was the reason¹².

It is also imperative that childcare remains affordable with adequate childcare benefits and childcare rebates continuing to be made available to working families. The results of the *Sydney University Police at Work Study* found in 2011 that one-in-ten police officers reported finding difficulty in coping financially and one-in-five report not always meeting their debt repayments on time¹³. This indicates many police do struggle financially.

Police live and work across the breadth of Australia from the dense metropolitan areas of our largest cities, where childcare places are highly competitive to the most isolated and regional areas of Australia where limited childcare services are available. Police families need access to the same high standards of childcare regardless of where they live and work.

Child Care Flexibility Trial Pilots

In 2012 representatives from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and Family Day Care Australia (FDCA) met with the Police Federation (PFA) to discuss the possibility of a partnership to roll out Child Care Flexibility Trial Pilots across a number of states.

The commencement of the Child Care Flexibility Trial Pilots in 2013 across the states of New South Wales and Victoria was greeted with a positive response by police, however as the trial commenced mid-year and has only been seen as a trial, take up has not been as strong as we would have liked initially. We are confident however that as more members sign up, word of mouth will ensure it is well patronised. Funding for the trial will also go to a study to be conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

What we would like to see for the future is a commitment by the Government to further support an affordable model of flexible childcare which guarantees policing families across the breadth of Australia access to childcare when and as they need it.

⁹ NSW Police Child Care Needs Survey

¹⁰ Police Association of NSW, Part Time Survey

¹¹ Police at Work Wave 4 Report p32

¹² Police at Work Wave 4 Report, p41.

¹³ Police at Work Wave 5 Report p28

Policing does not take a break on weekends or public holidays, it is essential that childcare be available outside the normal 9-5 hours, and away from the normal bricks-and-mortar model of centre-based childcare, enabling greater workforce participation amongst particularly women in the police force and supporting career pathways of parents whilst at the same time ensuring they can do their chosen jobs safe in the knowledge that their child's welfare is being looked after.

The PFA would be happy to provide further information if that was required.

Sincerely yours

Mark Burgess
Chief Executive Officer