



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Child Care

SPEECH

Monday, 23 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 23 February 2015
Page 816
Questioner
Speaker Chesters, Lisa, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (10:19): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Family Day Care (FDC) is a flexible, quality early education program in Australia that:

(i) provides flexible programs that cater to the needs of thousands of working parents;

(ii) operates under the National Quality Framework; and

(iii) currently has the capacity to care and educate children in their own homes; and

(b) the Government:

(i) is cutting \$157 million and implementing changes to the Community Support Program (CSP) that will remove the funding of over 80 per cent of FDC services around Australia; and

(ii) informed the FDC sector that the program changes would only impact new applicants, then introduced a budget proposal to apply the new guidelines to all services; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) genuinely consult with FDC providers about what sensible rule changes are needed, if any; and

(b) re-instate CSP funding for all FDC services currently funded under the program.

The benefits of family day care cannot be overstated. Family day care provides flexible, quality education programs in Australia and is already utilised by 94,000 families and over 130,000 children. It is delivered by 14,000 educators, 99 per cent of whom are women. In Australia, most family day care operates as small businesses run by women who support other women returning to work or education. These family day care services are monitored and supervised by family day care coordination services around the country. Family day care educators provide access to affordable programs that cater to the needs of thousands of working families, including families who have non-standard work hours and rely on the flexibility of family day care.

Family day care services are particularly important to regional communities such as the many small towns in my electorate of Bendigo. This is because in these centres there is less available long day care. In many regional towns, particularly the smaller ones, they may not have long day care services. Hence the reason that family day care is a good alternative. In my electorate of Bendigo, family day care provides services to families living in small towns such as Newstead and Taradale, as well as the area of Harcourt and other small towns like Heathcote. These families would not otherwise have access to the limited childcare services available in larger towns just up the road. Family day care services provide a cost-effective option to people who are working part time and who may not be able to afford or need long day care services. As stipulated by the national quality framework, family day care provides the low staff-to-child ratios that are required, in a homelike environment which is critical to supporting children and nurturing them at their youngest ages. The benefits of supporting high-quality child care has now been well established not just by experts in the field but also by economists and by our education system. What we as a country need is our government's support for a wide range of services to support our youngest Australians.

We need a well-funded, well-resourced family day care network to underpin a strong early childhood education sector. It provides an alternative for those who cannot access long day care services. The implications of the cuts

proposed by the government cannot be underestimated. As I said, there are about 130,000 children currently in the care of around 14,000 family day care workers, and the cuts of \$150 million proposed in the budget will remove 80 per cent of the services that help coordinate and ensure the quality of care that is required. This means that educators will have to either close their small business or seek to develop a relationship with the remaining schemes that are in operation under scarce resources. To ensure quality within the family day care system, we need these networks to exist.

I am sure that speakers from the government side will outline problems that have occurred. I understand those problems but, rather than axing the whole system, we need to support these services and ensure the quality that remains. The cuts proposed in the budget will deny access to a diverse range of childcare options. It will mean that vulnerable children will have less opportunity to attend formal, organised family day care early childhood education. Cutting funding is another example of how this Liberal government is totally out of touch with the needs of families and with the needs of women, particularly those in regional areas like mine. The implications of these cuts on workers and families cannot be underestimated, and that is why I call on the government to reinstate the funding, to consult broadly with the sector and to put forward real reforms that will only strengthen the family day care sector.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Ms Hall: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.