



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Petition: Childcare Funding**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 3 November 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 3 November 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Ley, Sussan, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms LEY** (Farrer) (12:26): I rise to table a petition on funding for occasional childcare. I am therefore pleased to present this petition.

*The petition read as follows—*

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the withdrawal of Federal funding support for occasional childcare services.

For thousands of families in Australia alternate short term care arrangements for their children is neither a financial or practical option. The withdrawal of this funding will remove a parent's option of accessing occasional care at hundreds of community run centres, resulting in more children forced out of formal and regulated care.

This directly disregards the committed aim of all Australian Governments to ensure safe and quality controlled 'early childhood care' nationwide.

We therefore ask the House to support the immediate reinstatement of the \$12m in occasional care removed in the Federal budgets of 2010/11 and 2011/12.

from 2,333 citizens

Petition received.

I want to remind the House about how divided and directionless this Labor government is. We have seen a pattern of incompetence, a pattern of failure, whether it be roof batts, school halls, the live cattle trade or the NBN. Today I want to talk about another train wreck under this Labor government: childcare reform.

Child care under Labor is heading towards the cliff edge, with Minister Ellis and Minister Garrett greasing the wheels. Their one-size-fits-all approach is casting aside the very people that Labor purports to represent—working families, working mums and dads with children, who are battling rising costs under this government and battling a fragmented family way of life.

Under the new national quality framework, childcare centres are pushing up their fees by as much as \$100 a week. Without even blinking an eye at that, the government keep telling us how much more generous their childcare rebate is. Then they have the hide to cut \$700 from it and cap it for three years. Under their new universal access arrangements for kindergarten, preschools are now tossing out their three-year-old children just to squeeze in the mandatory 15 hours a week for four-year-olds. Visiting American Professor Joseph Sparling, who attended the House yesterday, spoke very passionately about the fact that early education is critical, not necessarily at the age of four years or in the preschool years but at three months and younger. Yet the government's rigid one-size-fits-all approach is not allowing some of that allocated money to flow to the most disadvantaged children in our society.

Every time someone stands up to tell the government what is wrong and to offer suggestions, they go back to their default position of hiding under the protection of a COAG agreement. COAG agreed to Labor's ideology in principle only to see this government botch the actual implementation.

Then we come to the 'occasional care' debacle, which I wish to highlight today, the cuts of \$12 million to annual funding two years ago. Thousands of children across the nation are set to miss out on their own quality early childhood learning because of this government fumbling its responsibilities. Occasional care is set to be subject to the same onerous rules and red tape under the national quality framework but without any federal support. Not

all of us can or do work full time. Not all of us can afford or need full-time child care. Minister Ellis needs to understand we cannot all fit within her tick-a-box approach to the industry. The minister said a week ago:

The Australian government has never had a direct funding relationship with these services ...

But on 22 July this year the minister said:

Child care funding is a shared responsibility between the Australian, state and territory governments. Nothing has changed on that front.

The coalition, the Greens, parents and even the minister's own department know it is the Australian government which is responsible for supporting occasional care. The only remaining piece to complete the puzzle is the minister. On the subject of occasional care particularly, I wish to formally lodge this petition which calls on this federal government to reinstate the \$12 million in funding that it cut from occasional child care in the last two budgets. The withdrawal of this funding is removing parents' option to access occasional care at hundreds of community run centres, resulting in more children being forced out of formal and regulated care.

This directly disregards the committed aim of all Australian governments to ensure safe and quality controlled early childhood care nationwide. This petition contains several thousand signatures. It has been considered by the standing committee this morning—it might have been yesterday morning—and it is in accordance with the standing orders. I take this opportunity to table it before the House.

In the remaining time I have I remind the minister, as we approach the edge of the cliff—the implementation date for these rules is 1 January next year—that when I go to the website under which I read about what is happening in terms of progress I find one thing which I want to point out. It says, 'Services will receive documentation about the new rules. Expect to receive them before Christmas.'

The new rules start on 1 January next year. And the government is sending out final copies of the documentation relating to the new rules, which people should expect to receive before Christmas. I make the point that there is quite a bit of work to do before implementation only five days later.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Hon. Peter Slipper ):** I understand that the honourable member for Farrer has sought to present a petition. I am advised that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions has said that the petition is in order so it is now received pursuant to standing order 207.