

11 July 2006

The Chair,  
House Standing Committee on Family and Human Services  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Madam Chair,

I make the following comments on your Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family and in particular point 2 of your Terms of Reference – ‘making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce’.

The thrust of the public submissions at your Perth hearing and from several of the submissions I have read is that people want the Government to make childcare/nanny costs tax deductible, thus making it more financially attractive for both parents to return to work. This approach might satisfy the ‘work’ side of the equation, but does little to address the ‘life/family balance’ side.

I am the eldest of five children. Apart from the time when my mother was actually having the children, both my parents worked at every opportunity. As a consequence, not one of the five children completed secondary education and we had all left home and gone our separate ways by the time we were 16 years old. A more dysfunctional family you could not wish to meet. My father died a couple of years ago and I suspect that my mother now wishes that she had put more time into the family than she did.

I am not suggesting that only mothers should stay at home with the children. When I found myself without a job and my wife went to work, I stayed at home with a 3 year old daughter and an 11 month old son. My wife has been the ‘breadwinner’ ever since and over the years I have eased my way back into the workforce by way of family friendly, part-time jobs as appropriate to the children’s needs. Apart from some Family Allowance in the early years, we have received no Government assistance, nor expected any.

My point is that a stable home situation, with at least one parent in attendance whenever the children need them is crucial to the raising of well adjusted young Australians. I believe that placing babies in childcare when they are only weeks old is tantamount to child abuse and should not be encouraged by Government subsidy in any form. I would prefer to see any Government assistance directed towards families where the parents take full responsibility for raising their own children. Income splitting might be one way of doing this, but I do not claim to be an expert in taxation or related financial matters.

I suspect that most of the things that would make for a better Work – Life (family) Balance are non-financial and are best provided by employers. Things such as flexible working hours, sick child leave, on-site childcare and many others are not the purview of Government. My employers have ranged from very small business to government and in all cases I made clear what my requirements were and, with a bit of give and take on both sides, workable solutions have always been reached.

I am not claiming to be the world's best parent – far from it - , but I am now the proud 'owner' of two Gen Y teenagers who I am pleased to let loose on the world. Parenting is a job in itself, with little or no training given and it requires a full-time commitment and not a little sacrifice. It cannot properly be done in the hours outside of paid employment.

If Government is serious about encouraging Work Life Balance and it believes that it should offer financial incentives to achieve this, then it will ensure that parents have an equal choice between going to work and staying at home.

Yours faithfully,

Trevor Hay