

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 988
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Publication:
Attachments:
Submitter Comments:

From: [REDACTED]
To: Education Employment Training and Skills Committee
Subject: EGPA Bill
Date: Thursday, 21 March 2024 2:15:48 PM

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong opposition and disappointment to the proposed Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, in particular the changes to home education.

When my husband and I chose to start our family eleven years ago, our children's future education was not something we had given thought to. My own mainstream public schooling experience throughout the mid 1990's-2000's, was nothing short of enjoyable. I was a high achiever both in academia and sports. I was respected by my peers, teachers, and heads of the school and to this day I have fond memories of both primary and high school. However, I firmly believe that the main impetus to me being a decent member of society is because of the stable and loving upbringing my parents gave me. Despite my academic success and memorable schooling experience, I feel that the education system didn't fulfill my potential. I was academically intelligent only because I was studious, but since entering the real world after high school I have realised my education had been based on results and achievement rather than deep learning, curiosity, and retention of knowledge. When my eldest was born just over ten years ago I knew that being his primary carer, his closest support and role model, his Mum above all, was my priority. When he came of Kindergarten age we had very organically, with no resentment or judgment to the mainstream alternative, chosen to continue with our learning at home style and I knew that homeschooling would be our path. My four children have no neurodivergence, no learning difficulties, no bullying horror stories from mainstream education; I am sure that in the right school, they would continue to be decent, intelligent, kind, upstanding people, not because of anything which the school can offer, but because their home environment is stable and filled with love and engagement. We are homeschoolers by choice. My husband has built a business that affords us the freedom for me to be at home, for our chosen lifestyle. We spend thousands of dollars per year from our own pocket on curriculums and resources, classes and outings, well aware that our out of pocket expenses at the local public school would be minimal. We receive zero from Centrelink or other government assistance. My kids are worldly, curious, and self motivated, they are intelligent emotionally, socially, and by standard academic measurements. They are well spoken and we are regularly praised for the people they are.

The proposed legislation raises several concerns for me which I am yet to hear addressed openly and honestly. Firstly, the highly ambiguous use of the phrase "high-quality program of education"; who is this standard determined by? Is our current state government implying that the steadily declining maths, reading, and writing standards of our kids, not to mention the increasing rates of youth crime, is due to the "high quality education" being provided to them by the state (<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/gonski-school-reforms-given-poor-report-card-20220913-p5bhn8#:~:text=The%20Productivity%20Commission%20says%20that,system%20was%20designed%20to%20advance.>)? I am highly concerned about the lack of transparency with the use of this phrase and the power it could potentially give the government over the 80% of homeschooling families who have been successfully providing their children with a high quality education without the use of the Australian Curriculum. I have half a dozen anecdotes from close friends and family who have left their teaching careers in the past decade due to increasing administration and reporting demands. One of the reasons homeschooling is important to me is the time I get to spend with my kids while they are young, the important years that we don't get back. Enforcing the use of ACARA would mean more time spent planning and reporting, and thus less time spent with my kids. It would mean less flexibility to learn topics deeply which interest us, detract from the personalised teaching I currently provide them with, create a rigid "school at home" environment which is the antithesis of why we homeschool, and with my four kids between three and ten years old, lead to us simply ticking the boxes to get through each day.

At the Committee's public briefing on the 18/3/24, Kathleen Forrester spoke of the 195% increase in homeschool registrations since 2019 and said "...it's important to understand what's happening to drive that growth, and to change that growth, and to make sure that as the sector changes with many new people coming in to home education that our regulatory response is appropriate". Her notion to "change that growth" would imply that the government doesn't support the rights of parents to home educate and would prefer that our kids are under the education system. Given home schooling is a legal option of schooling, I find it interesting that Kathleen Forrester and the Queensland Labor government would have any biases. Rather than further regulating home education, I suggest the committee delve further into the myriad reasons families are turning away from mainstream schooling and choosing to homeschool. The current approach of regulation and mandating adherence fails to acknowledge the core issues with the current education system and risks further alienating homeschool families from the education system.

We are active members of our community, my kids and myself are involved in sports clubs and other extracurricular groups. We are in a lower-middle class suburb near Ipswich and we regularly witness mainstream schooling kids being degraded, verbally abused, physically threatened, and bribed through threat or junk food reward to participate, by their parents. I have watched the same suburb I grew up in become the suburb with the highest crime rate in the state, whilst high density housing estates and schools have popped up on every corner. I suggest Di Farmer step out of Bulimba and spend some time observing how many kids who are within the education system are being raised. It is an insult to the homeschooling families who sacrifice time, money, careers, and incomes to ensure a loving, rich, and supportive home education for their children, to be told that these amendments are being made in the interests of the child's safety and well-being.

Finally, I am concerned that this legislation has been introduced to Parliament without proper consultation with homeschooling families, and the ensuing behaviour from some Labor MP's has led me to believe that the lack of consultation was almost, perhaps, a deliberate oversight. In my experience our "representatives" are uninterested in hearing from homeschooling families and are actively trying to silence and shut down our voices.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and hear my experience and concerns. I look forward to your response.

Regards,

Sandra Taylor
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