21 October 2009

Dear Ms Belcher

SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY ENTITLEMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the review of the Parliamentary Entitlements.

My submission goes to the first term of reference:

Developing a single principles-based legislative basis that authorises the provision of specific entitlements, identifies who is eligible to access these entitlements and in what circumstances, and the purposes for which these entitlements may be used.

In particular I wish to highlight the difficulties the current entitlements framework possesses for breastfeeding mothers and Members and Senators with primary care of young children.

There are a number of ways in which the current entitlements system makes it difficult to combine both a role as Parliamentarian with that of a primary care giver.

Travel – Family Reunion

Interstate

The current travel entitlement allows for 3 business class return trips to interstate locations per financial year for eligible persons.
The Federal Parliament is an accredited breastfeeding friendly workplace. The Interstate - family reunion travel entitlement limitation, while appropriate, does place pressure on breastfeeding mothers.

It would be of assistance if the interstate trips for eligible persons are unlimited for Members and Senators travelling on Parliamentary business and who are breastfeeding until such time as their babies are weaned. This would remove pressure of early weaning.

**Canberra and Intra State**

The current entitlement allows for 9 business class return trips to Canberra for spouse or nominated person and 3 business class return trips to Canberra for each dependent child.

The 2010 Parliamentary Sitting Calendar has scheduled 18 weeks of Parliamentary sittings.

While children under 2 do not require a seat on domestic flights once they reach this age a separate booking is required. Even with pooling the 3 interstate trips, 9 spouse or nominated person trips and the 3 for dependent child, utilising economy and cheaper airlines this does not cover the travel requirements of Senators and Members with primary care of a child under 5 for Parliamentary sittings let alone any other travel.

It would be of assistance if travel for Members and Senators with primary care of a child under 5 and the spouse or nominated person could more accurately reflect the care needs of this small group. It may be rectified by allowing the Special Minister of State some discretion in this matter and the possibility of looking at the very limited use of frequent flyer points.

**Travel Allowance**

The current entitlement for travel allowance is paid to cover the costs incurred for accommodation, meals and related matters when Senators and Members are travelling overnight on specified parliamentary business.

Different daily rates of Travelling Allowance apply in different parts of Australia with a lower rate applying in Canberra.

The Travelling Allowance does not cover costs of attending Parliamentary Sittings with primary care of a baby for example additional costs are charged by accommodation providers for porta cots and highchairs and often more than one bedroom is required.

**Car – with driver Services**

The current entitlement provides a car with driver services (generally ComCar) in Canberra.
The main difficulty posed here is the unpredictable nature of when babies wake or get sick not always fitting shuttle times and the requirement for notice for Com Car bookings.

It would be of assistance if this entitlement could be turned into an entitlement to have a car in Canberra while primary care of a child under 5 continues while still keeping a limited entitlement to ComCar on initial arrival and departure from Canberra.

**Conclusion**

While the circumstances I am juggling are by no means unique I am currently the only Member of Parliament with primary care of a child under 5 who utilises the Capital Hill Early Childhood Centre here in Parliament House.

I would be happy to provide a private briefing on my own circumstances if that would be of assistance to the Committee in its deliberations.

My submission does not cover the circumstances of Members and Senators who are parents but do not have primary care of their children during sitting weeks. I am aware from informal discussions with them that the current parliamentary entitlements system does pose some challenges for this group of parents. It may be worth seeking the views of this group as to how the current entitlements system may better reflect their work and family balance.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Catherine King