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MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

13 March 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senators

Senate Inquiry into the immediate future of the childcare sector in Australia

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the legislated peak body representing Victorian Local Government. Councils are the leading provider of early years infrastructure in Victoria and all Victorian councils are committed to the aim of providing children in their municipality with the best possible start in life through effective planning, development and provision of services that improve the health, connectedness, education and care of children and their families.

Local government has been integral to the implementation of the 15 hours of Universal Access to Early Childhood Education and the National Quality Framework in Victoria. The collaborative approach of the three levels of government in Victoria should be continued to ensure that access to affordable, high quality early childhood education and care remains a priority and is comparable to Australia's OECD counterparts.

The MAV notes that many of the terms of reference for this inquiry are similar to the terms of reference for the recent Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning. The MAV submission to the Productivity Inquiry is attached for your considerations in reference to the Senate Inquiry into the immediate future of the childcare sector in Australia.

In doing so the MAV would like to highlight the following as key issues that need to be addressed as they greatly impact on the immediate future of the childcare sector in Australia. They are:

- The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education must be extended beyond its current expiry date of 31 December 2014.
- Support for the expansion of the current home-based models of care to provide increased, flexible options for families.

- Provision of no cost access/fee relief for vulnerable children and their families to access early childhood education and care services regardless of where those families are located.
- Establishment of a Commonwealth/State/Local Government Early Childhood Education and Care planning body to:
 - plan for current and future publicly funded service provision
 - foster a diverse range of options for families
 - aims to simplify the current Commonwealth/State funding arrangements with a view to collapsing the current fee support schemes.

The MAV appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and recommends the Commonwealth Government maintain the commitment to the continuation of the National Partnership across the three levels of government and builds on and refines the current service system and funding.

Please contact Ms Clare Hargreaves, Manager Social Policy on _____ or
_____ should you require further information or wish to discuss anything in
this submission.

Yours sincerely

ROB SPENCE
Chief Executive Officer