Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee

Quality and Safety of Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care System

From: Emma Middlebrook

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I am writing as a parent and community member who has personally visited childcare centres and witnessed practices that I believe are unsafe.

## What I observed was:

- Educators being left alone in rooms with very young children, including infants under two.
- When I raised this concern, staff pointed to the current 1 educator to 4 children under two years ratio as justification.

This showed me that the current framework allows unsafe practices to occur daily.

## Concerns

- 1. The 1:4 ratio for children under two is unsafe.
  - Infants require constant attention and care.

- One adult cannot safely manage the needs of four children under two years old at the same time.
- 2. Sole supervision in childcare centres should be prohibited for all children under five.
  - No educator should ever be left alone in a room with children this young.
  - Children under five and particularly those who are non-verbal — are vulnerable and cannot always communicate their needs or raise the alarm if something is wrong.
  - Sole supervision also exposes children to potential predatory behaviour from adults, which is an unacceptable risk.
  - Removing sole supervision requirements protects both children and educators: it safeguards children while also supporting educators to do their job to the highest standard, with the reassurance of a colleague always present.
- 3. Technology and privacy concerns.
  - Some centres are installing surveillance cameras to monitor rooms. While these may improve accountability, if cameras are connected to Wi-Fi networks, they present a significant security risk.
  - Wi-Fi connected cameras can be vulnerable to hacking and unauthorised external access.
  - If cameras are used, they should be on closed systems with no Wi-Fi capability, to ensure children's safety and privacy are not compromised.

## **Recommendations**

I urge the Committee to recommend that:

- 1. The 1 educator to 4 children ratio for under-twos be abolished, and replaced with a safer, lower ratio.
- 2. Any form of sole supervision of children under five in childcare centres be prohibited, to protect children from risk and support educators in their work.
- 3. If surveillance cameras are installed in centres, they must not be connected to Wi-Fi, and instead operate on secure closed-circuit systems to prevent unauthorised access.

## Conclusion

The safety of children must come before cost-cutting or convenience. Ratios and staffing rules must ensure children are never left in unsafe situations, and technology must be used responsibly to protect their privacy and security.

I believe the Committee has a vital opportunity to strengthen the system so that:

- No child under five is ever left in a room with only one adult.
- Infants under two receive the safer care they deserve.
- Educators are supported to do their job properly, always with the reassurance of another adult present.

• Surveillance systems cannot be exploited through insecure Wi-Fi connections.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Middlebrook