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SUBJECT: Work/Family Submission

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WORK AND FAMILY INQUIRY

As a relationship counsellor, mother of three and owner of a parenting support website, I have ample opportunity to discuss the work/family balance with clients, friends and family.

As we are all aware, the cost of living forces many mothers back into the workforce to provide a second income for their families. This forces many couples to put their children into day-care, when they would rather raise their children at home. Even if they are happy with the decision to use child-care, many couples find that the places simply aren't available. If they are, the fees are so expensive that many couples wonder what they are working for. For families who decide that it is best that the mother not return to paid work, often the only other option is for their husbands to work two jobs to make ends meet. This means that the father is often unavailable during his children's waking hours, his wife feels (and is) unsupported in her role at home, and they all miss out on quality family time. All of these scenarios put families into a "pressure-cooker" situation where, no matter which way they turn, there are major and unending stresses to deal with. In my experience this directly contributes to the breakdown of many relationships.

Most people I speak to both personally and professionally are simply looking for some balance in their lives. Many mothers I speak to in fact *want* to work part-time in order to:

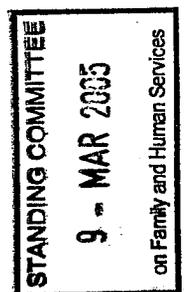
- Use their education and retain and update their professional skills
- Enhance their self-esteem and sense of identity
- Have an income
- Take the pressure off their husbands having to be the sole breadwinner

Many fathers that I speak to support their wives efforts to work so that they:

- Don't carry the sole burden of financial pressure
- Have more time to spend with their children
- Can be more involved in the day to day running of the household
- Have more opportunity to get away from work-related stresses

Some professions don't seem to offer part-time work at all eg. Law. Eventually women will steer away from these professions entirely if they want to be mothers as well as professionals. In professions where some employers do offer part-time options, many don't, and as a result, lose out on skilled, committed employees who enjoy working and appreciate the opportunity to do so.

I have heard of women who trained and worked as lawyers, office managers, sales people etc. before they had children only to be forced to take on cleaning and



supermarket shelf-stocking positions because there weren't any part-time employment opportunities in their chosen professions. What an immense waste of skill and talent.

All of this begs the question: *is it possible to somehow give employers an incentive to provide more part-time or more flexible employment opportunities?* That way, mothers returning to the work force would have the more desirable option of part-time employment, and only have to put their children in day-care a few days a week. Furthermore, if it were financially viable for both parents to work part-time, they could look after the children on their days off.

Employers have over six months to prepare to replace an expectant mother. This would give them ample time to restructure a position so that it could accommodate two part-time employees instead of one full-time one.

I imagine that the creation of more part-time employment opportunities would be attractive not only to parents, but to anyone who feels it would be a better option than working full-time – those moving toward retirement or those who have been unemployed for a period of time and who are building up their confidence for example.

I have never put in a submission before – I hope this is in line with your expectations. Feel free to contact me if you have any need for clarification or desire my input in further exploration of these issues.

Regards,

Elly Taylor
