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Legislation Reform Unit,
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Discussion Paper No.3, General Provisions for Education and Early Childhood Development as part of the Education and Early Childhood Development Legislation Reform. I use this opportunity to also bring to your attention the education and early childhood development issues that affect regional constituents.

Small Schools: Under the new Student centric funding model small country schools will be the losers. The State Government has made a 'guarantee' that no schools will receive less funding than what they receive now and that no schools will be 'worse off'. I sincerely hope they keep this promise for all small schools but I do not see how they will, given that some small schools will possibly not have enough enrolments to attract sufficient funds to keep the schools open. Can you guarantee that no schools will close? Regional children already travel long distances on school buses particularly in the north and west of the state. If you were to close their nearest school, it makes the journey even farther. Add to this is the fact that children have to get up in the dark and travel home in the heat of the day due to daylight savings for six months of every year. I do not believe that school by correspondence would be a better option for these children who need the socialisation as well as the education provided at school.

First Aid: The State Government wants to make First Aid courses non compulsory in order to avoid providing the funding for staff to receive the training. This means staff will have to pay for the training and significant travel expenses (in rural areas) themselves. I have no doubt this will result in a decrease of staff renewing their First Aid qualifications. In regional areas where some schools are completely isolated from any township, out in paddocks (Karcultaby and Miltaburra Area Schools for example) with the nearest hospital miles away, possibly without a doctor, and the local ambulance manned by volunteers, this really could be a matter of life and death. First Aid Training needs to be compulsory in schools, particularly regional schools and paid for by the education department to ensure that someone with these skills is available in a crisis.

Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) & Vacation Care: There is a huge need for OSHC & Vacation Care in regional areas particularly for children of working families and disabled children and young adults. Not only does OSHC provide an essential service to working parents, it provides respite to families of disabled students. The issue of non recurrent funding is on going, with no permanence for the staff or children attending. It is difficult to secure **appropriate** venues and sponsors to host these programs however co-location with existing schools and kindergartens can work well and should be encouraged (for example kindergartens are not appropriate for older children 7-11 years but on occasions are being forced to be used because no one else will sponsor). Commitment and continuity is essential.

School buses: I am contacted regularly by constituents in my electorate regarding accessing School Buses. The sudden change of bus routes in Port Lincoln in July 2006 with no prior consultation outraged and significantly impacted on hundreds of parents in town and surrounding areas. When changes like this are made it is vital that all families affected are consulted prior to the change, not told after a decision has been made. Schools buses are essential in regional areas, families can not get their children to school without them, yet the State Government with their population based funding model require a certain numbers of passengers to keep these buses running. If one family leaves the district this can be enough to see the bus taken away or realign a route to the disadvantage of other families. This is not in line the Government's commitment to social justice enabling education accessible to all South Australians. I have examples of parents travelling over 100 kilometres a day to get their children to school finally splitting their family and keeping to households to allow mum to stay in town during the week.

Schools Buses- Pre School access: There is a real issue with preschool students (i.e. Kindergarten students) not being officially counted as 'students' on school buses. These younger students often can make up the 'mandatory' numbers needed for a bus route but are not recognised by the Government as being 'actual' students because preschool education is technically not compulsory, even though the State Government claim they are encouraging preschool attendance. With the joint Federal and State Government's pledge earlier in the year to provide up to 15 hours a week of preschool education to every preschool aged child, it is vital that these children are given the opportunity to access preschool services. Families should be commended and assisted to take up the opportunity for children to attend preschool, by being counted as students on schools buses and/or provided with a travel allowance for parents transporting their preschoolers distances further than 5 km's in line with school aged students. Children living in remote areas need preschool options even more than their city counterparts who have other options.

High Schools-

Subject Choices: I believe more core subject options for students in regional high schools should be available (e.g. Maths, sciences) even by correspondence with appropriate counselling to assist in choosing a career path so that country students can be adequately educated for career choices that are needed in regions (doctors, allied health, engineers etc).

Mileage allowance: Many regional students live a considerable distance from their high school. When in Year 12 and study periods are provided, this brings more freedom to study at home or elsewhere. Accordingly it doesn't always suit students to take the bus to school and they may instead drive to school. A travel allowance given for kilometres travelled should be made available and to attend specific courses that are more than 5km from their home. Travel allowance should also be given for school field trips.

Travel Allowance: Students in regional areas, like their metropolitan counterparts, like to attend tutorials or be a part of study groups that travel for educational experience. The State Government should assist country students with travel costs by providing small grants similar to the PATS scheme.

Living Away from Home: Some school students are living away from home while studying. Often this can become an overwhelming task for parents and students - trying to support themselves and studying as well. The State Government should provide assistance to students living on their own and provide them with subsidised utility cost and food and fuel vouchers even when their family's assets are above the limit.

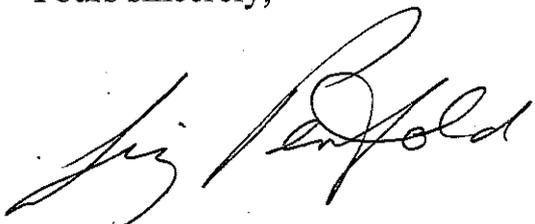
Other students are forced to leave remote and small home towns for boarding school simply because there are insufficient options available for them. These families are particularly disadvantaged as they are forced to pay for high school education for many years and later tertiary options.

Tertiary: Many rural students choose not to go on to tertiary education because of the excessive costs involved. For metropolitan students, it is largely a case of travelling to Uni/Tafe not unlike going to school. Country students however have to leave their family and home, find accommodation, some form of transport, and often find a part time job to provide the money to pay for it all. Many country students can not receive youth allowance from the Federal Government because their parents supposedly earn 'too much' (or own a farm or small business and are asset rich but income poor) but do not have enough to support another household on top of their own. Students earning \$18,850 in 18 months can be considered as independent therefore qualifying for youth allowance however they can not begin to 'officially' earn until after their last day at school. As a result some students choose to have a 'gap year' working in their home towns first but unfortunately this often means Uni dreams are forgotten. I believe this scenario is contributing to the lack of professionals in country areas. It is generally country students who will return to country areas to work once they have their degrees yet opportunities are lost if they are given no incentive to further their education. There is also very little incentive for metro based students to move to the country upon completion of studies. The State Government needs to encourage Year 12's to continue onto tertiary education by providing an ex gratia payment to regional students moving to Adelaide to commence tertiary study to assist in accommodation and initial setting up home expenses. Even if a student takes the year to earn the required amount to access youth allowance, payments do not commence until about May of the year by which time families have already had to outlay considerable funds. The State Government should lobby the Federal Government in lowering the amount necessary to be considered independent based on geographical data.

Finally I mention youth mental health. Unfortunately this causes many of the problems in our schools and is where a lot of adult mental health issues originate. Currently there is no continuity of care between CAMHS and Country Health and very little done at all to assist young people in regional areas. There are no locally based psychiatrists at all in my electorate.

I trust you will take these regional issues into consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz Penfold', written in a cursive style.

Mrs. Liz Penfold MP

cc Shadow Minister for Education David Pisoni