

Workforce is the key to building child-safe environments:

Joint Statement from Not-for-Profit Early Childhood Education and Care Providers to changes to National Law

As leaders of some of Australia's largest not-for-profit early learning providers, we welcome the National Law changes being considered by the Victorian Parliament this week as a positive step forward for parents and the early childhood sector.

We welcome increased government funding to Regulatory Authorities.

However, safeguarding children is not just a regulatory obligation – it is an imperative shared by our values driven organisations. We are committed to high quality early childhood education and care. We know that quality and safety go hand in hand and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to child safety and wellbeing, and our commitment to working with governments across the nation to drive improvements in quality and safety.

This legislative reform is an opportunity to put in place the foundations of an early childhood system that knits together, strengthening child safety in quality early learning. It's critically important that we get the foundations right – starting with supporting early childhood teachers and educators in our profession.

Children's safety is so important, we should resist anything which compromises that objective, however well-intentioned. Children are not safer if experienced teachers and educators leave the sector. We are concerned some elements of the bill will make it harder to retain experienced teachers and educators, particularly in crucial leadership roles.

We call on the Victorian Parliament to reconsider the trebling of personal fines on educators and nominated supervisors. Under the bill, ECEC educators, among the lowest paid but most critical workers in our economy, could face fines of up to \$34,000, well in excess of what they may face for similar offences if they occurred in a school. Fines must be proportionate to the offence, with heavy fines reserved for the most egregious offenders and for providers who have not created safe environments.

We are calling on the Victorian Parliament to ensure the National Educators' Register gives providers access to employment history of prospective employees. We have the duty of care to children and families and need the information to make the right choices about our workforce. As high quality, not for profit providers, we are on the frontline, day by day, looking for full information to be able to safeguard children.

It is also clear that more is required to build a system that knits together to create improved child outcomes and end the postcode lottery parents face. We look forward to those broader national conversations to build that joined-up universal national system – from service planning and approvals, to supporting professional development and growth in the experience and knowledge of our workforce, to how funders and regulators work with providers to achieve shared goals.

As purpose driven providers we invest funding and fee income in programs for children, we commit to the following:

- **Listening to Children:** We recognise that children are often the first to disclose harm. We train and resource our staff to listen carefully and act on any concerns raised by children in our care.
- **Embedding a Culture of Vigilance:** Child safety is at the heart of every decision, policy, and practice in our services. We are committed to fostering environments where vigilance is second nature and where every adult understands their role in protecting children.
- **Strong Governance and Accountability:** Our organisations embed robust, transparent governance frameworks that ensure accountability at every level. We invest in and demand rigorous recruitment, induction, and supervision processes, and zero-tolerance of misconduct.

- **Ongoing Professional Development:** We make substantial investments in professional learning to ensure our teachers, educators and staff are equipped to recognise, prevent, and respond to signs of grooming and abuse. This includes rigorous and ongoing mandatory child protection training.
- **A Culture of Speaking Up:** We are committed to creating psychologically safe workplaces where staff feel empowered and supported to raise concerns without fear of reprisal.
- **Sector-Wide Reform:** We support the government in their stewardship role to provide oversight, drive continuous improvement, and ensure that quality and child safety are not compromised.

Families place significant trust in us as providers, and we must uphold it through consistent action, transparency, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Today, we ask governments and legislators to stand shoulder to shoulder with us and the very many experienced and committed early learning professionals who know that investing in our workforce is the surest way to keep children safe.

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