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PATRON His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC (Retd)
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

PRESIDENT Judy Radich ABN 44 950 767 752



Hon. Carmel Tebbutt
Minister for Community Services
Level 259
Castlereagh Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

I am writing on behalf of the national executive of Early Childhood Australia to express our grave concern at the decision by the NSW Government to maintain its regulated ratio for children, birth to two years of age, in long day care services, at one adult for every five children. This is particularly disappointing and difficult to understand given that the draft regulations specified a ratio of one adult to every four children.

Our concern is based on the unequivocal research findings demonstrating that care which is sensitive and responsive to a child's signals and cues is a critical element in development of secure attachment and that such relationships set the stage for children's future development. The early relationships with the caregiver (parent, child care worker), become a prototype for the interactions and relationships a child will have later in life. (1)

What is clear is that children will take care of themselves only as well as they have been cared for. As well as this, across all studies of vulnerability and resilience, the single most important factor accounting for good outcomes in the face of high-risk circumstances is a relationship with a caring, supportive adult (2), (3)

The issue for Early Childhood Australia is the knowledge that ratios of 1:5 will not sustain the responsive, sensitive care of the very young child that is necessary to ensure secure attachment. It is simply not possible to be responsive to the needs of five children under the age of two. How does the carer respond when two or three or four are needing attention at the one time? Does it mean that the youngest is not nursed while they are feeding or that the need for attention must be uniformly ignored for most of these children. It is inevitable that this will be so despite the best efforts of child care workers to meet the needs of the five very young children in their care.

ECA is concerned that even one adult to four very young children is insufficient. Our very strong view is that one adult to three children is necessary if the best interests of these young children are to met. We understand the pressures on baby places but are unaccepting of strategies to deal with this that compromise the outcomes for children under two. However, this is a short-term solution that will have significant long-term costs for these children. Not only this but the decision to maintain ratios at 1:5 will further undermine the willingness of early childhood professionals to work in this sector.

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We ask that you reconsider your decision about ratios and to reinstate the one adult to four children ratio that was proposed in the draft regulations.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judith Radich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Judith Radich
National President.

27 May 2004

References

1. Attachment Theory and Real Life: How to Make Ideas Work
<http://education.umn.edu/ceed/publications/earlyreport/spring96.htm>
2. Child-adult attachment: a lens for viewing decisions that affect children and families
http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/childhood/resources/Child-Adult_Attachment8-98.html
3. Attachment Theory and Research <http://www.zerotothree.org/vol20-2.html>