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Union welcomes child safety legislation – and calls for more reform

The union representing teachers in early childhood education and care welcomes legislation passed by federal parliament today that would cut government funding from childcare providers repeatedly failing safety requirements.

“The IEU supports blocking federal funding from substandard providers,” said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews. “This is the first step towards building a much stronger child safety culture and restoring confidence in the sector.”

But there is more to be done. “Our members are appalled by media reports in Sydney today of allegations of child abuse by a staff member who worked in some 60 centres,” Matthews said.

“We note also that many workplaces where he was employed were vacation care and before-and-after-school-hours services. It is clear both the early childhood education and care sector and the out-of-school-hours sector need urgent change to rebuild a strong child safety culture.”

The union welcomes a further package of reforms to boost child safety that will be the focus of a meeting of education ministers in August.

“Staff in the sector need mandatory training in their obligations and assurance of a safe mechanism for making a report,” Matthews said.

“While we must eradicate criminals, the vast majority of teachers and educators are doing an exceptional job under difficult conditions and they deserve more support. Staff should not be punished for raising safety concerns.”

The union calls for considered solutions not quick fixes. “While CCTV has its place, it cannot be installed in baby-change rooms and bathrooms. And it is no substitute for a building a strong culture of child safety with well-trained, properly paid staff,” Matthews said.

The union welcomes plans for a nationwide register of early childhood educators and seeks clarification of what this register would mean for degree-qualified teachers who are already required to be registered under state laws.

“We call for greater national coordination of the sector, including reforms to the Working With Children Check system and a searchable national register of WWCC holders.”

The union also wants more safety training for providers and closer monitoring of staffing ratios. Matthews said there needs to be a stronger focus on the education and care of children – not side-tracking staff into cleaning and administrative tasks.

“Real reform means fixing acute workforce shortages through better wages, manageable workloads, and comprehensive training in child safety and protection,” Matthews said.

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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