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Submission to the Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment (Small Business-Penalty Rates Exemption) Bill 2012

I am a retired teacher now, but in 1968 I worked full time in retail in Washington State, a relatively prosperous region of the United States. There, there were no penalty rates. My story is what I observed then, compared to what I have observed since in Australia.

If penalty rates were abolished in Australia,we would have the roster system. Since few people want to work on weekends, in order to avoid favoritism, the employer puts all staff on a roster. Each employee must agree to work every other, or every third weekend, as part of their condition of employment.

Mothers with young children are frequently the people who work in retail, and they are called upon to go on the roster, along with everyone else. Where this affects single parents, again often the case in retail, the results are dire for children.

In the US in 1968 I was a young, single person. The weekend roster didn't matter much to me, but I heard about the hardship from the mothers I worked with, particularly on Sundays. It was exceedingly cruel.

On the other hand, when I emigrated to Australia the following year I found myself in a country that understood employers must pay more if they want staff to work at unsociable times.

The extra pay in Australia meant that some staff always volunteered to work on weekends. Parents with young children were usually not required.

Since 1969 in Australia, we have seen more and more deregulation of shopping hours, but workers have continued to be paid extra for the unsociable hours. This is seen as fair.

My own daughter worked at on weekends as a high school student. She never complained, because she was paid well for it. What's more we, her parents, could see that other workers' not wanting to work on Sundays meant that our teenager could get her first job.

I urge the committee to keep penalty rates. We are a country that values families. Having the cruel roster system that forces all employees to work some weekends destroys family life. When single parents are required to work on Sundays, as I observed in retail in the US, the results for children and their parents are heart-breaking.

Submitted by

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