

**Submission
No 101**

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Organisation:

Name: Ms Clover Moore MP

Position: Member for Bligh

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Date Received: 14/03/2005

Subject:

Summary

GPSC2 GPSC2 - PSO ATLAS Submission from Clover Moore MP

From: Electorate Office Bligh
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Subject: PSO ATLAS Submission from Clover Moore MP

Legislative Council
GENERAL PURPOSE
STANDING COMMITTEES

14 MAR 2005

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Dear Stephen

Clover has asked me to forward you a copy of her submission to the Inquiry on the PSO and ATLAS programs.

I apologise for the lateness of this submission, and hope that you can still include Clover's support for an adequate program in the work of the Committee.

Please let me know if there are any problems or you need additional information.

Regards

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14 March 2005

The Hon Patricia Forsythe MLC
Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Legislative Council
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Patricia

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY

I write this submission on behalf of a number of constituents who are concerned about proposed changes to Post School Options (PSO) and Adult Training, Learning and Support (ATLAS) services for young people with severe disability.

Community service providers and constituents who have contacted me strongly support reform of the ATLAS/PSO program. However, they are very concerned that the Transition to Work (TTW) and Community Participation (CP) initiatives do not provide people with disabilities and their families appropriate education and training, nor the resources needed to provide these services.

My submission supports the community's concerns and recommends that the Government review decisions about the TTW and CP programs to ensure that the programs are effective and adequate.

Program Framework

Constituents who have contacted me, say that the two year timeframe of the TTW program is too short to allow people with disabilities to develop employment skills.

These programs must be long term and focused on developing skills and getting jobs if they are to help people with disabilities be fully part of the community.

Family Advocacy has suggested that this can be achieved through individual packages that are tailored to named individuals, transferable to a range of service providers, delivered through a common selection criteria based on a functional assessment of individual needs, with guaranteed funds to cover costs, and responsive to changing individual needs.

NCOSS has informed me that, despite the program already operating, negotiations between Commonwealth and NSW Government have not yet validated that the TTW is consistent with open employment or Commonwealth employment programs. Participants will enter TTW with no guarantee of either employment or entry into Commonwealth programs.

I recommend that the Government ensure that TTW links with Commonwealth funded employment programs.

My constituents are also concerned that participants will get locked into a CP program with no opportunity for skill development. They are very concerned that the reduced levels of funding will lead to increased larger group activities for people with the highest support needs. I share their concerns about participants being forced into "one size fits all" programs, and the risk of fewer opportunities for people with lower support needs.

Funding

The Minister says that the 2004 changes aim to achieve better employment outcomes for current ATLAS participants, and long-term support for young people with a disability who are not able to gain employment. However, many constituents have expressed concerns about the impacts of these changes, and tell me that the changes may appear to have been driven by financial imperatives.

I share my constituents' concern that per capita funding cuts and block funding will reduce opportunities for people with disabilities, and that extensive tendering and reviews of service provider eligibility will reduce continuity for participants.

The Disability Services Act 1993 requires service providers to meet standards of individualised care, and recent funding cuts will result in reduced service hours for individual participants. This will reduce quality of life for participants, and require group homes to provide more support, transferring costs to another program. Community service providers inform me that cuts to ATLAS services have already resulted in an increased demand for respite services.

I share my constituents' concern that while block funding may increase flexibility for service providers, it will reduce learning opportunities for people with disabilities, and reduce funds for people with complex support needs. People with disabilities have long argued that support services should be tailored to meet individual needs and at the choice of the service user, not service providers.

I support community calls for adequate funding to be directed to individuals, and designed to meet their specific needs.

I understand that \$18 million per annum is to be cut from funds for more than 3,000 people supported by the Adult Training and Learning Assistance Scheme (ATLAS) and Post School Options (PSO) programs. The retention of PSO funding at the current level of \$19,600 per person will not help individuals in the CP program, particularly those who have complex support needs and abilities, but will receive nearly half the level of funds.

Those who have contacted me say that there is no financial incentive for service providers to move a person on CP at \$9,000 to TTW at \$15,699 if there is no guarantee of entry into Commonwealth employment programs or employment opportunities. Constituents suggest that this will result in people with a disability being locked into the CP program with no prospect of future employment.

I share concerns that limited CP funds must result in fewer hours or a reduction in the ratios of staff to participants. Service providers will have to reduce service quality to provide the same hours of service.

The Government should provide:

- ***Sufficient funds for people with a disability to participate five days a week in adult education, vocational training, and paid work;***
- ***Funds for support needs such as transport, mobility and personal care; and***
- ***Funding through individual packages, targeting specific needs based on individual assessment and negotiation with the person needing support.***

Evidence and Consultation

My constituents tell me that there was no consultation with them about the tendering process, cuts to individual funding and the move to block funding. They are concerned that there has been no public release of the "program evaluations" which the Minister states are the basis for these changes, and I share their view that this information should be public.

Community service providers tell me that the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) did not seek their input about the impacts on service quality or hours, and did not provide information about the anticipated cost to accommodation and respite services, which will have to increase services to cover reduced program hours.

I understand that DADHC has now contracted the University of Wollongong to report on ATLAS; however the 2004 changes have pre-empted this analysis. Constituents and service providers who have contacted me say that DADHC has not produced evidence that changed programs will meet the needs of people with disabilities, or that the TTW program will achieve employment.

I support community calls for a thorough analysis of effective services to help people with disabilities get jobs and have the best opportunities to participate in the community. Service providers, service users and advocates should be informed about the rationale for these programs and provide input to the decisions.

The Government should reform these programs based on evidence and input from the community before decisions are made.

The Government should ensure that TTW and CP programs provide real opportunities for people with a disability to gain employment and participate in community life. I am concerned that the Government should address the concerns that service users and service providers have raised about the capacity of these programs.

I support community calls for:

- ***Clear links between NSW disability programs and Commonwealth employment programs;***
- ***Adequate funds to provide services for all those who need help;***
- ***Service models based on individualised programs that meet personal needs;***
- ***Ongoing support for individuals as long as they need help; and***
- ***Ongoing dialogue with service user and service provider representatives.***

Yours sincerely

Clover Moore
Member for Bligh