

**Submission
No 18**

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mrs Maria Bramley-O'Connor

Date Received: 17 June 2022

Dear Mark,

Please can you make a recommendation to the Minister Sarah Mitchell for me, Maria Bramley-O'Connor.

The reason I am asking for your assistance is that my temporary exemption from vaccination has expired (today – 10th June 2022), and despite following all the processes set out by the Department, my application for renewal has been turned down. I am very unhappy and confused by this decision for the following reasons:

1. I have taken the necessary steps required as per the Department's Health and Wellbeing team's request to gain another exemption. This includes having the appropriate forms completed by a medical specialist (my cardiologist) and completing the relevant Department requests in advance of the expiration of my current exemption.
2. Despite my circumstances not changing since my original application for exemption, the Health and Wellbeing Team have rejected this request. This makes no sense to me, as these were the exact grounds – signed by the same medical professional – upon which my original 3 month exemption was granted. How can everything be the same but the decision made by the Health and Wellbeing Team be different?

I would like to know what medical qualifications the 'medical experts' at Sonic Health have that allows them to override the medical decision made by a fully qualified expert who has actually seen me and examined me? They have never met me, never consulted my medical file, and never contacted my doctors or cardiologists for information, so what are the grounds upon which they can be justified in making a medical diagnosis on the 'risks' attached to the vaccine for me? This is deeply concerning.

This has occurred at a difficult time for me, and for our school in general, and there are a number of impacts that will come from me not being able to work – even though I am fully qualified and willing to work. Some of these impacts include:

1. The impact that this is having on my family and my health, due to stress. I have no leave left to take because of the vaccination mandate, so I will not be receiving an income. Bills still need to be paid: my mortgage especially.
2. The impact this is having on my school, in particular my colleagues and our students. I currently teach 3 senior classes in specialised subjects which I am qualified to teach and experienced at teaching. If the Department truly cares about education and about the wellbeing of students, then surely the top priority should be ensuring that experienced and qualified teachers are available to teach – especially for Year 12 students who are deep into their HSC year. Do you think parents care more about the vaccination status of the teacher, or whether there is a qualified teacher in front of the class at this stage in their child's education?
3. In my school context, this compounds the other issue we already have: finding qualified teachers (or even teachers at all) to place in front of classes. Our students have already been through disruptions from COVID, plus the two recent flooding events that have placed them under additional pressure to complete coursework before the HSC. If the school now needs to source casual teachers to cover my classes they will not be qualified in these subjects, and more likely, they will be given as extras or minimal supervision to other staff who are already

overloaded with pressures from the current situation in NSW education. I am also a mentor to Year 12 students which is pivotal at this time in their life, to provide these students with guidance, support and skills to manage their health and well-being through to the end of next term.

4. My students have major HSC work which is due at the start of Term 3. If we can't manage in this current climate to get an English teacher in our school, what chance do we have of getting a Senior teacher in to cover my classes and support my students in completing their HSC major work? Please ask the Minister this question, what does she propose we do?

For all these reasons I am pleading for your support with my current situation. It seems to go against everything the Premier has indicated in public on vaccine mandates and comes at a time where the Public Health Orders have already been scrapped. At this time, given that so many of our students and staff have either already had COVID or currently have COVID, how can my presence at school be deemed too great a risk to students and staff? This makes no sense, and the impacts it is having at a personal, school, student and even community far outweigh any perceived 'risk' I may pose in the workplace.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter. Your time and attention are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Maria Bramley-O'Connor