

Ms [REDACTED]
Nominated Supervisor
RE: Hearts & Minds Early Learning McKellar
Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms [REDACTED],

Show Cause Notice – Potential Compliance Action

1. I am a delegate of the ACT Regulatory Authority (the Authority), also known as Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA).
2. As you are aware, the Authority is the regulator of education and care services in the ACT and has the responsibility of monitoring and enforcing compliance with the *Education and Care Services National Law* (the *Law*). One of the Authority's roles is to investigate suspected offences under the *Law*.
3. The Authority is currently investigating multiple suspected offences at Hearts & Minds Early Learning McKellar – SE-40025658 (the Service) operated by Grassroots Childcare Operations Pty Ltd – PR-40022092 (the Provider). Web addresses to the *Law* and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (the *Regulations*) are provided for your convenience at the end of this notice.
4. Authorised Officers have now finished obtaining evidence from other sources (unless further lines of enquiry emerge) and the Authority has determined that there is sufficient evidence to support a case for you to answer regarding a suspected offence under the *Law*.
5. However, the Authority's investigation is not complete until you have had an opportunity to respond to the allegation and evidence obtained by the Authority. This is the reason for sending this Show Cause Notice (Notice) to you, as Nominated Supervisor of the Service. Detailed instructions of how to respond appear at the end of this Notice.
6. If substantiated, the allegations may constitute an offence under sections 166 and 167 of the *Law*. If, after considering all available evidence, the Authority finds any offence is substantiated (or any combination of them), it will need to consider whether compliance action is required.
7. Where offences under the *Law* are substantiated, the Authority considers many factors when determining appropriate action, the focus being on ensuring future compliance and improved outcomes for children, rather than punishment. Further details regarding potential compliance actions appear at the end of this Notice.

Grounds for issuing Show Cause Notice

8. Evidence obtained during the investigation to date supports offences under the *Law* within the following areas: Inappropriate discipline and Protection from harms and hazards.

Facts

9. On 5 March 2024, the ACT Regulatory Authority (the Authority) received a notification of complaint alleging that a current staff member used inappropriate discipline by grabbing a child by the arm to move him away from a water bubbler. Refer Attachment A.
10. On 5 March 2024, further information was furnished by Provider including the following relevant documents:
 - a) Conversation with [REDACTED]
 - b) Witness Version [REDACTED]
 - c) Conversation [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
 - d) Parent Complaint

Refer to Attachment B.

11. Due to the risk of harms and hazards likely to cause injury if children are inappropriately disciplined, the Authority determined to investigate the matter, which engaged suspected offences under sections 166 and 167 of the *Law*.

Grounds – Inappropriate discipline and protection from harm.

12. On 4 March 2024, about 5:00pm the Nominated Supervisor failed to ensure that no child being educated and cared for by the service is subjected to any form of corporal punishment or discipline that is unreasonable in the circumstances in that with Educator, [REDACTED] taking the child, [REDACTED] (4:2) by the arm, pulling his arm above shoulder height, in order to redirect him away from a water bubbler, in contravention of Section 166(2) of the National Law and giving rise to a contravention of section 167(2) of said *Law*.

Legislation Relevant to Allegation

13. The following provisions of the *Law* are relevant to Allegation.

Section 166(2) of the Law - Offence to use inappropriate discipline

A Nominated Supervisor of an education and care service must ensure that no child being educated and cared for by a service is subjected to-

- (a) Any form of corporal punishment ; or
- (b) Any discipline that is unreasonable under the circumstances.

Penalty: \$10 000, in the case of an individual

Section 167(2) of the Law - Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
A Nominated Supervisor of an education and care service must ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children being educated and care for by the service from harm and from any hazard likely to cause injury.

Penalty: \$10 000, in the case of an individual

Evidence relevant to Allegation

14. On 3 May 2024, the Provider furnished documents pursuant to 215 Notice including the following relevant documents:

- a) Child Attendance
- b) Working Directly with Children records
- c) Policy and procedures
- d) Personnel file [REDACTED]
- e) ACT Ombudsman Reportable Conduct Scheme 17G
- f) Internal Investigation

Refer Attachment C.

15. Authority records identify you were Nominated Supervisor for the Service on 4 March 2024.
Refer Attachment D.

16. Documents furnished by Provider to the Authority upon request include contemporaneous confession from accused educator Ms [REDACTED] to removing the child's hands from the tap by holding his wrists. This version of events is supported by the evidence of, educator Ms [REDACTED] who also completed a file note regarding the incident. Refer to Attachment B for file notes.

17. During the investigation, the Authority obtained witness statements, relevant extracts from which appear below, with personal information redacted where appropriate. Due to the specific circumstances surrounding the alleged offences, witnesses are identifiable from the content of their evidence.

18. Please note that educator witness statements were obtained utilising powers under section 215 of the *Law*, imposing an obligation to attend before the Authority and provide relevant evidence under questioning by an Authorised Officer. It is an offence to fail to comply.

19. Relevant extracts from Witness A's statement include:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

20. Relevant extracts from Witness B's statement include:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

21. Relevant extracts from Witness C's statement include:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Contraventions supported by evidence.

22. Evidence gathered appears to support that [REDACTED] was subjected to corporal punishment, in that he was grabbed on the wrists by Ms [REDACTED] contravening section 166(2) of the *Law*, and giving rise to a contravention of 167(2) of the *Law*.
23. Ensuring that no child is subjected to corporal punishment, or discipline unreasonable in the circumstances, is viewed as being a reasonable precaution to take to protect children from harm likely to cause injury.

Fitness and Propriety as Nominated Supervisor

24. *Regulation 117C* provides some guidance on minimum requirements for a nominated supervisor, being that they must:
 - a. be over 18 years of age;
 - b. have adequate knowledge and understanding of the provision of education and care to children; and
 - c. have the ability to effectively supervise and manage an education and care service.
25. The concept of fitness and propriety is not fixed. It is dependent on context and requirements of the particular position and may change over time to meet social and political expectations. At minimum, fitness and propriety includes honesty, knowledge and ability.
26. Nominated supervisors have extensive responsibilities under the *Law*, relating to the broad areas of supervision, staffing, protection of children from harm and hazards, and educational programs, with specific obligations contained in both the *Law* and the *Regulations*.
27. Accordingly, to be a fit and proper person to be appointed as nominated supervisor, the person must be honest, have a deep knowledge and understanding of the National Quality Framework (including compliance responsibilities).
28. The nominated supervisor must also possess the ability to manage educators and any other staff, service premises, relationships with families and respond to children with medical and/or behavioural needs.
29. During the investigation, there is no apparent evidence identifying that you ensured [REDACTED] was not subjected to corporal punishment, or inappropriate discipline on 4 March 2024, being a reasonable precaution to take to ensure children are protected from harm and any hazard, likely to cause injury.
30. This evidence raises a concern about your ability to manage and supervise an education and care service.

31. The purpose of this Show Cause Notice is to provide you with an opportunity to respond to the evidence outlined above, and to specifically address the point of your fitness and propriety to be a nominated supervisor.

Potential Compliance Action

32. The Authority reiterates that no decision has been made at this time – this letter is a step in the investigation process. However, procedural fairness requires that the Authority take this opportunity to advise you of potential compliance actions, if any offences are substantiated and/or the Authority finds that you do not meet the fitness and propriety requirements to be a nominated supervisor. Potential compliance actions are under Part 7 of the *Law*, and include:
- a. Non-statutory action such as a formal caution letter;
 - b. Enforceable undertaking under section 179A of the *Law*; or
 - c. Prohibition from acting in a role as Nominated Supervisor.
33. Relevant legislation for enforceable undertakings and partial prohibition appears below.
34. An enforceable undertaking may include requirements such as undergoing additional training, having a mentor, advising the Authority of any proposed change in employment.
35. A partial prohibition only applies to the role of nominated supervisor and not to the education and care sector as a whole.
36. It may prevent you from being in a role as nominated supervisor if the Authority finds that you are not fit and proper, or it may place conditions on you being in such a role if you are fit and proper but do not possess all the required skills and knowledge.
37. It is not always permanent, and the partial prohibition must be cancelled by the Authority if it is satisfied that there is not a sufficient reason for the it to remain in force.

Section 179A - Enforceable undertakings

- (1) This section applies—
 - (a) if a person has contravened, or if the Regulatory Authority alleges a person has contravened, a provision of this *Law*; or
 - (b) in the circumstances set out in section 27(a), 72(a) or 184(3).
- (2) If subsection (1)(a) applies, the Regulatory Authority may accept a written undertaking from the person, under which the person undertakes to take certain actions, or refrain from taking certain actions, to comply with this *Law*.
- (3) If subsection (1)(b) applies in relation to the approved provider of an education and care service, the Regulatory Authority may accept a written undertaking from the

approved provider, under which the approved provider undertakes to take certain actions or refrain from taking certain actions in relation to the education and care service.

- (4) If subsection (1)(b) applies in relation to a person other than the approved provider of an education and care service, the Regulatory Authority may accept a written undertaking from the person, under which the person undertakes to take certain actions, or refrain from taking certain actions in relation to an education and care service.
- (5) A person may, with the consent of the Regulatory Authority, withdraw or amend an undertaking.
- (6) The Regulatory Authority may withdraw its acceptance of the undertaking at any time and the undertaking ceases to be in force on that withdrawal.
- (7) The Regulatory Authority may publish on the Regulatory Authority's website an undertaking accepted under this section.

Section 182(3) - Grounds for issuing a prohibition notice

The Regulatory Authority may give a prohibition notice to a person to –

- (a) Prohibit the person from being a nominated supervisor if the Regulatory Authority considers the person is not a fit and proper person to be nominated as a nominated supervisor of a service; or
- (b) Impose one or more conditions on the nomination of the person as a nominated supervisor that the Regulatory Authority considers appropriate, if the Regulatory Authority considers the person is a fit and proper person to be nominated as a nominated supervisor of a service subject to those conditions.

Right of response

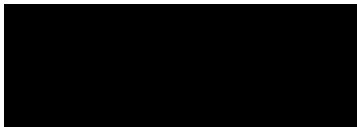
- 38. As mentioned previously, this letter is your opportunity to respond to the allegations and evidence set out in this Notice, in addition to the question of fitness and propriety. You may, within 14 days of receiving this Notice, make a written submission for the Authority's consideration in deciding if any offences are substantiated and, if so, whether any compliance action should be taken.
- 39. At Attachment E to this Notice is a '4 Step Guide to Responding to a Show Cause Notice' to assist in the development of your submission. Please direct your written submission via email to Jarrod.Reid@act.gov.au or by post to:

Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA)
Education Directorate
Attention: Jarrod REID
GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601.

Caution

40. I am informing you that the excerpts of statements of witness taken for the purpose of the Authority's investigation are included in the interests of procedural fairness. The statements taken during the investigation are protected disclosures under section 296 of the *Law*.
41. The *Law* provides, at section 297, for the protection of persons who make protected disclosures from serious detrimental action against reprisal.
42. Please also be aware that it is an offence under section 295 of the *Law* to provide the Authority with false or misleading information or documents.
43. The *Law* applies to you as a nominated supervisor and to any service you are engaged at. The *Law* is applied in the ACT by the *Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Act 2011* <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2011-42/default.asp>.
44. The *Law* and *Regulations* can be viewed at: <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-law>, and <http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2011/653>
45. Should you have any questions about this Show Cause Notice please contact Senior Investigator Jarrod REID on email Jarrod.Reid@act.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Nicole Withers
A\g Assistant Director
Children's Education and Care Assurance
Education and Care, Regulation and Support

25 July 2024