



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION AND PROCEDURE
Speaker (Chair), Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA,
Mr Andrew Wall MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of Standing Orders

Submission Number: 1

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Dear Joy,

Recommendations to the amendment of standing orders to accommodate milk dependant babies and their MLA parent in the parliament.

Just a note because I know I undertook to submit to your review of standing orders regarding breastfeeding and pairs.

There are basically 2 issues which I think could slowly be better resolved for parents of babies in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

1. How to resolve the lack of pairs for minor parties
2. How to fine tune the provisions for actually feeding in the chamber.

On the first point, there is a practice in the House of Reps for breastfeeding (or indeed bottle feeding) parents to be able to indicate their vote to the whip on a given vote and that that vote be counted while a member is in their office. I realise there would have to be a bit of study go in to how this is practically done, however, it would be worthwhile on 2 fronts. The first being that if a parent were for example to have a baby with colic, then they cry/scream when being fed (I have fed 2 babies with this condition), and as a result feeding is a very stressful and noisy experience, or if a baby has tongue tie for example they are not so easy to feed as to just be able to put them on to feed in the chamber, for these parents the option of remaining in the office or breastfeeding room may be more realistic. Secondly, it would allow a cross bencher's vote to count when they really have no option for a pair, given that they are likely to want to exercise their right to vote with different groupings on different issues.

Recommendation 1: that we change the standing orders to allow a proxy vote from the member's office as per current HOR practice.

On the second point, we do have quite forward standing orders in the sense that mums can bring a baby into the chamber if it needs to feed. However, the wording and practice could be slightly tidied up. The wording, although I don't have it in front of me at the moment, implies that the baby **must** be **fed** while in the chamber and I believe this leaves the parent with a bit of a vulnerability. It is altogether possible that the bells ring when someone is mid feed, the baby is taken off the breast to carry it down to the chamber, then the baby, having had a small break from feeding not longer wants to feed in that exact moment. This may only become apparent once the baby and parent are in the chamber. Is it necessary for the member to get the breast out and offer it to the baby if their instinct or knowledge of the child says that though the baby is there the feeding need not exactly take place **at that actual moment in the chamber**? I always wondered when feeding Maximus in the chamber that if he stopped feeding could I technically could be kicked out because he wasn't actually on the breast? This worry added to the stress of the situation.

There is also the matter of moving a baby off the breast and onto a bottle, and as this process is complex and different for every parent and child, and it may take a little bit of time, to avoid engorging and infection of the breasts etc, it would probably be better of the standing orders did not demand that the baby must be breastfed to be in the chamber... sometimes there are reasons why a baby with a breastfeeding mum may be on a bottle.

It is also worth noting that while this is a matter which primarily engages breast feeding mothers, it is also possible that a father or a non-breastfeeding mother could have milk feeding responsibilities for a baby and men or non-breastfeeding women should not be excluded from the ability to bring a

bottle or tube fed baby into the chamber. So wording should not purposefully exclude these two categories.

So, all in all it would be better if it is left to the parent, so maybe the standing orders could say that a breast or bottle or tube fed baby, or simply a “milk dependant baby”.

The exact wording for this that I think is the best I have ever seen are the new HOR standing orders as amended last year or the year before after the committee inquiry which was held after the incident when Kelly O’Dwyer was asked to pump more so she could be in the chamber! The whip at the time not really understanding that breasts are not just taps one can turn on and off that easily!

Recommendation 2: that the standing orders be amended to reflect that the milk dependant baby can come with parent into the chamber if the parent thinks it necessary – or something to that end.

I can’t see any parent bringing a breast or bottle dependant baby into the chamber for the wrong reasons, I don’t believe it would ever happen, it’s an exhausting and stressful time as it is. Also in the case of Breastfeeding, the law backs the right of the parent to feed when and where needed for the primary goal of the health and wellbeing of the baby. If the review is interested in the legal backing of this It can be provided upon request. Some parents will never want to go down this path but there will be some, and it is important that they are allowed to judge wherever possible what is best for their child in the unique context of the chamber and the parliament in general given the responsibility we each carry to to all in our power to represent our voters.

Those are my recommendations to tidy up this area. I’m happy if requested to make them more specific in suggested exact wording changes. Just let me know.

If you need any more info or explanation please just email!

Kind regards,

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Member for Murrumbidgee

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