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FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE
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Submission Cover Sheet

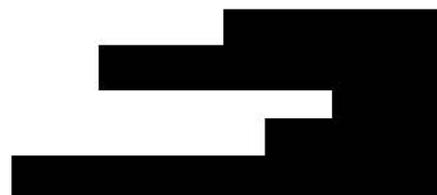
COVID-19 pandemic response

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The Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic
response
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
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Submission to The Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response

Good Afternoon:

My name is Carolyn Morton and I am the mother of a year 10 student in the ACT.

I wanted to reach out and express my anger, frustration and confusion regarding the Chief Minister and his government's decision to close all ACT public schools and to move to remote learning for **all** of Term 2. I Believe this is a bad decision for many reasons, and I would like the decision to be reversed at the earliest opportunity.

When remote learning was announced for term 2, I was hopeful that it would be a positive experience, but I have to say it has been absolutely appalling—not just for me and my daughter, but for many of my friends and their children as well. I have spoken directly with 11 different friends who send their children to a total of 7 different schools across the ACT, including primary and high schools. **NO ONE** has had a positive experience with remote learning. None of us are happy with the level of education our children are currently receiving.

Mr Barr claims that we have the best remote learning in the country? Let me tell you what my friends and I have observed first hand:

- 1.) Students done with ALL work by 10:30 am.
- 2.) Students unable to talk directly with their teachers with the exception of ONE 15 minute “meet up” per week online.
- 3.) Students unable to contact teachers directly, and therefore unable to get extra help or one-on-one assistance when needed.
- 4.) Teachers telling my daughter that they have “no idea” how they are going to give the students a grade in classes like SHAPE and Hospitality, where hands on work and exercise needs to be done and observed.
- 5.) Teachers telling students there will be no tests or exams because they cannot be sure the students won't cheat on their exams.
- 6.) SHAPE teachers accepting photos of family walks as proof of fulfilling the SHAPE curriculum.
- 7.) Depressed students who cry and say they just want to go back to normal and go back to school.
- 8.) Full time working parents going mad trying to work and home school at the same time.
- 9.) Young children unable or unwilling to remain focused with online learning and parents giving up out of frustration, and letting their children watch television instead of staying logged on.
- 10.) Special Education teachers telling me that remote learning for special needs students is a “complete farce.”

This is simply not good enough. It is not **AT ALL** what we were promised when we were told that our children would receive “the best” remote learning!

Now, if Covid-19 was completely out of control in Canberra and we had hundreds dying or in hospital, perhaps I could then justify my daughter and other students sacrificing their education due to the danger—but we all know this is **not** what is actually happening in Canberra. Canberra is a success story. We have effectively eliminated Covid-19 from our community. Even **IF** remote learning was good (which it is **NOT**), there is no reason to continue

with it when it is safe to go back to school! There can be no doubt that even superior remote learning is no substitute for real time, face to face learning. Therefore, if the virus is completely under control, and if schools are safe places for both children and teachers (and we know that they *are* because our chief medical officer of Australia, and nearly every other medical officer in Australia and in the world--with the notable exceptions of ACT and Victoria Australia-- are **ALL** saying that schools are safe !), then I do not understand the reason to continue with remote learning for this entire term. You use remote learning *only* when you have **no other choice** —and it is clear that we have a choice in the ACT.

I can understand why the Chief Minister originally envisioned term 2 being entirely remote. When he made the initial announcements at the start of April, things were looking very grim in Australia and the rest of the world. But things have *changed*. And I would like to see a leader who can change when the information changes. We have flattened the curve beyond our expectations (wasn't that the whole point? To flatten the curve--not to entirely eliminate the virus and make sure no one ever gets it, but to flatten the curve and prepare our hospital system? I thought that was the point, but the narrative on that seems to have changed!)), and now is the time to begin the road back. Our hospitals are empty, our city is healthy. The safest place to begin the road back would be the schools. No, the risk is not zero, but everything we do in life, from getting out of bed to driving a car to getting on an airplane entails some risk. As calm, mature adults, we know that life is about weighing risk versus benefit on a daily basis. I think it is abundantly clear that the benefits of children returning to school far outweighs any small risk of transmission of the virus at this point.

Last week, several studies were published stating that remote learning was detrimental to all students, and especially to Indigenous and English as a second language students. One study indicated that students could fall behind by 6 to 12 weeks, depending on the student. This is completely unacceptable, and frankly it is more terrifying to me than the virus itself. I want my child to be ready for college next year, and university after that. I do not want her falling behind due to remote learning, especially when there is *no sound medical evidence, no good reason* to force her remote learn when she could go back to school tomorrow.

Does the Chief Medical Officer of the ACT know something that ALL the other chief medical officers around our country and the world do not know? If so, please enlighten us. Otherwise, I am forced to conclude that our Chief Medical Officer and our Chief Minister are making decisions based on fear, rather than scientific and medical advice and statistics.

On a personal level, I would like to convey to you my heart ache when my daughter cries on a daily basis because she misses her friends and social interaction. She wants a formal. She wants a graduation. She wants to enjoy her last year of high school with friends. She wants to mark her milestones as we all did when we were her age...School is about far more than staring at a computer screen for a few hours or doing maths problems. It is about social interaction, physical exercise and learning to navigate the world around us. This does NOT happen when you are staring at a computer screen! I fear for our children's mental health is this goes on much longer. We all say that we believe mental health is as important as physical health—so prove it.

Please let cooler heads prevail and let common sense rule the day. Do NOT make decisions based on fear. Return our children to school, where they will be happier and they will receive a proper and complete education, and please do this without delay.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.