

Ms [REDACTED]

RE: Hearts and Minds Early Learning McKellar

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms [REDACTED],

Show Cause Notice – Proposed 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 may be 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 obtained evidence from several sources and the Authority has determined that you have a case to answer regarding a suspected offence under the *Law*. 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. Detailed instructions of how to respond also appear at the end of this Notice.
5. If substantiated, the alleged conduct may constitute inappropriate discipline, which is an offence under section 166(3) of the *Law*.
6. “Discipline” is any strategy employed by an educator with the intention of changing a child’s behaviour. Discipline that is inappropriate within the meaning of section 166 of the *Law* includes any form of physical punishment or any behaviour management strategy likely to cause emotional or physical harm to a child. Examples include hitting, yelling, physically dragging a child, unreasonable restraint of a child, using threatening or humiliating language, isolating, or shaming children.
7. If, after considering all available evidence, the Authority finds an offence has occurred, it will need to consider whether compliance action is required. The Authority considers many factors when determining appropriate compliance 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 area: Inappropriate discipline of a child.

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 upon request including the following relevant documents:
 - a) The child subject to the notification details.
 - b) A summary of a conversation between the Centre Director and a parent of the Child. Refer to Attachment B which is redacted in parts to protect individual identities.
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(3) of the *Law*.

Allegation of Inappropriate Discipline

On 4 March 2024, about 5:00pm, that you, [REDACTED] subjected a child to a form of corporal punishment or discipline that was unreasonable in the circumstances in that you took the child by the arm, pulling the arm above the child's head, in order to redirect the child away from a water bubbler, in contravention of **Section 166(3)** of the National Law.

Legislation Relevant to Allegation

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

Section 166(3) of the Law - Offence to use inappropriate discipline

A staff member, or volunteer at, supervisor of an education and care service must not subject any child being educated and cared for by a service 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

Evidence relevant to the Allegation

13. On 3 May 2024, the Provider furnished documents pursuant to 215 Notice including the following relevant documents:
 - a) Staff Records
 - b) Record of Responsible Person

- (b) to provide education and care to children.
- (2) For the purposes of subsection (1), a person may be involved in the provision of an approved education and care service as any of the following –
- (a) an approved provider;
 - (b) a nominated supervisor;
 - (c) an educator;
 - (d) a family day care educator;
 - (e) an employee;
 - (f) a contractor;
 - (g) a volunteer;
 - (h) a person who was formerly a person referred to in paragraphs (a) to (g) in relation to the approved education and care service –
or in any other capacity

Section 183 – Show cause notice to be given before prohibition notice

- (1) Before giving a prohibition notice, the Regulatory Authority must give the person a notice (a **show cause notice**) –
- (a) stating that the Regulatory Authority proposes to give the person a prohibition notice; and
 - (b) stating the reasons for the proposed prohibition; and
 - (c) inviting the person to make a written submission to the Regulatory Authority, within a stated time of at least 14 days, about the proposed prohibition.

Effect of an Enforceable Undertaking

22. An Enforceable Undertaking is a formal “promise” to the Authority to do or not do certain things. Terms vary, but examples of requirements are:
- a. only working with children under supervision; or
 - b. doing some additional training to improve your skills as an educator; or
 - c. keeping the Authority advised of your workplace; or
 - d. having an approved mentor.
23. It is a flexible way to ensure ongoing compliance with the *Law* and *Regulations* and may be appropriate depending on the level of risk to children.
24. If you offer an enforceable undertaking and the Authority accepts it, failure to comply with any of its terms after acceptance allows the Authority to apply to the relevant tribunal or court for an order under section 181(2) of the *Law* to enforce the undertaking.

Effect of a Prohibition Notice

25. If, after considering all available evidence and any submission you wish to make, the Authority decides to issue a prohibition notice, while the prohibition notice is in force you must not:
- a. provide education and care to children for an education and care service; or

- b. be engaged as an educator, family day care educator, employee, contractor or staff member of, or perform volunteer services for, an education and care service; or
- c. carry out any other activity relating to education and care services.

Right of response

- 26. Please note that the Authority has made no decision at the time of sending the Notice and will make no decision without giving you a reasonable opportunity to respond.
- 27. If you do not respond to the Notice at all, or within the allowed timeframe, the Authority can only consider the evidence it already has when deciding if any offences have been substantiated on the balance of probabilities and, if so, what (if any) compliance action should be taken.
- 28. You have a right to respond to the allegations set out in this notice. You may respond in writing or by way of a recorded interview with two Authorised Officers.
- 29. You may, within 14 days of receiving this letter, make a written submission for the Authority's consideration in deciding if compliance action should be taken. If you need additional time, please direct a request with reasons to the contact officer.
- 30. 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.
- 31. If you wish to respond in a recorded interview with Authorised Officers, please advise the contact officer within seven days. A convenient time will be arranged for you to attend at the Authority's premises in Stirling, ACT, to provide your response in person. You are permitted to bring a support person to that interview, as long as the person does not have any connection with the Provider or the Service.
- 32. If you respond in writing, please direct your written submission via email to Authorised Officer Jarrod REID at 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

- 33. Please be aware that it is an offence under section 295 of the *Law* to provide the Authority with false or misleading information or documents.
- 34. I am informing you that the excerpts of witness accounts taken for the Authority's investigation are included in the interests of procedural fairness. The statements taken during the investigation and the excerpts provided for your consideration in the show cause process are protected disclosures under section 296 of the *Law*.
- 35. The *Law* provides, at section 297, for the protection of persons who make protected disclosures from serious detrimental action against them in reprisal.

Legislation

36. The *Law* applies to you as an educator and to any service you may be employed at.
37. 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>.
38. 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>
39. Should you have any questions about this Show Cause Notice please contact Authorised Officer Jarrod Reid at 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
26 July 2024