



FairWear Campaign
130 Little Collins Street, Melbourne 3000
Phone 9251 5270 Fax 9251 5241
Email fairwear@fairwear.org.au
www.fairwear.org.au

Karen Ellingford
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

20th June 2007

Dear Ms Ellingford,

Please find attached FairWear Victoria's submission to the Education and Training Committee's *Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools*. FairWear Victoria would like to be given the opportunity to address the Committee if possible.

Regards,

Liz Thompson
Campaign Coordinator
FairWear Victoria

The two Terms of Reference for the Inquiry addressed in this submission are (c) and (d):

- the most cost efficient and practical uniform procurement arrangements and
- matters which need to be considered to ensure dress codes and uniform policies are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation and health promotion policies

Summary of recommendations:

- The Victorian Government should recognise the demonstrated commitment of Victorian school communities to the rights of outworkers by requiring clothing manufacturers supplying Victorian schools to be 'Accredited' to the Homeworkers Code of Practice.
- The Victorian government should adopt a stronger Ethical Purchasing Code in relation to the Textile Clothing and Footwear industry, which makes it imperative that suppliers have a transparent contracting chain and employ local workers under fair and legal conditions, similar to the Queensland State Government's 'Code of Practice on employment and outwork obligations'.
- The Victorian government should ensure that subsidies and transitional funding are provided to school councils and communities in less affluent communities to ensure that poorer school communities are not further financially burdened by ethical procurement policies.

Introduction:

Hong Nguyen, former outworker: *“Outworkers need the schools to speak out for them. Even now, outworkers do not have their rights yet. Unless the school does something with the company. Nothing will change.”*¹

The FairWear campaign is a national community campaign established in 1996 with the aim of bringing about wage justice for outworkers in the textile, clothing and footwear industries. We are seeking to assist outworkers to achieve their rights to a living wage, to organise, and to work in a safe and healthy environment. We are a coalition of community groups, churches, unions, students, artists and individual members. Over the past 11 years we have worked extensively with a diverse range of groups deeply concerned about the exploitation of outworkers occurring here in Australia. Throughout this time there has been an increased awareness within the community about the issues facing outworkers and the extent to which outworkers are central to the clothing industry in Australia.

Fair School Wear:

The FairWear campaign Victoria has a proud history of working with school communities to highlight the issues of exploitation of outworkers in the Australian garment industry. School communities in all sectors have been involved in the Fair School Wear campaign (<http://www.fairwear.org.au/engine.php?SID=1000009>) since its inception, and continue to be amongst our most active supporters.

It is the experience of the FairWear campaign, Victoria, that school communities are very receptive to making a commitment to ethical purchasing practices, and to informing themselves of the issues of outworker exploitation in the Australian garment industry. Over the decade or so that the FairWear campaign has existed, we have had contact with literally thousands of school students, and have collaborated with school communities in education and advocacy projects for outworkers. School students and communities have been an important part of the support base for outworker’s workplace rights in the Australian community. FairWear has received assistance and support from school communities through collaborative multi-media projects (such as the “No-Sweat school” DVD project) and continues to receive regular invitations to speak to student groups about the exploitation of Australian outworkers. As one Marian College student explained in the “No Sweat School” DVD: most students are greatly concerned to discover the amount of exploitation that goes on behind the making of their favourite clothing labels, and are equally disturbed to find that there is no guarantee that their uniforms are made by workers who are receiving the appropriate pay and conditions.

However, school councils and governing bodies find the process of questioning uniform suppliers about their supply chain somewhat confronting. Feedback to the FairWear campaign from school communities suggests to us that where schools do make the effort to contact their uniform suppliers directly to discuss ethical procurement practices, they receive a verbal assurance that all is well, and this is often where the discussion ends. School councils feel that they lack the necessary expertise to delve deeply into the work practices or contracting chain of their suppliers. For this reason, FairWear has resourced school communities with information about the HomeWorkers Code of Practice. Becoming accredited to the HomeWorkers Code of Practice is the best way for a uniform supplier to demonstrate both a commitment to and a practice of, ethical supply chain management, and award conditions and legal entitlements for all employees.

¹From the FairWear “No Sweat school” DVD, filmed in collaboration with Marian College, Sunshine, 2004

<http://www.fairwear.org.au/engine.php?SID=1000056> (last accessed June 8th 2007)

Making HWCP accreditation a requirement for school uniform supply will allow school communities to be at ease about the conditions under which their uniforms are made, and will put the onus for compliance work back on the Code Committee, and more broadly the government, not on overworked school councils and parents' committees.

Recommendation

- The Victorian Government should recognise the demonstrated commitment of Victorian school communities to the rights of outworkers by requiring clothing manufacturers supplying Victorian schools to be 'Accredited' to the Homeworkers Code of Practice.

Mandatory requirements such as those contained in the Queensland State Government's Code of Practice are, ultimately, more effective than voluntary codes such as the HomeWorkers Code of Practice. Making HWCP accreditation a condition of school uniform supply contracts should be seen as an interim measure, subsequent to which broader mandatory requirements should apply.

Recommendation

- The Victorian government should adopt a stronger Ethical Purchasing Code in relation to the Textile Clothing and Footwear industry, which makes it imperative that suppliers have a transparent contracting chain and employ local workers under fair and legal conditions, similar to the Queensland State Government's 'Code of Practice on employment and outwork obligations'.

Health promotion

Many of the teachers who make contact with FairWear do so because they teach the children of outworkers in Melbourne's Western and South Eastern suburbs. School communities are very willing to play a role to facilitate these student's socially isolated parents receiving the information they need about their work rights. If uniform policies enforced by the Victorian government are to be consistent with health promotion policies, then the Victorian government must act to eliminate the exploitation of outworkers in the school uniform supply chain.

According to the ground-breaking 2001 report into outworker conditions, "Home Sweat Home":

- About two-thirds [of outworkers] (68%) % reported relying on other family members to help. In 54% of cases, this was the husband/partner. In 31% of cases, the children assisted. Sometimes, neighbours and friends helped.²

Whilst the most common injuries reported amongst outworkers according to Mayhew and Quinlan³ involve back injury and overuse injury, the poor conditions in which much outwork is conducted takes a toll on the health of school-aged children in a number of ways:

'After I come home from school my parents give me time to do my homework. After I finish my homework I help my parents from four hours to six hours of work. I basically do some of the sewing and help my parents pack up. ... When there's a rushed job I spend more time helping my parents and sometimes ... I stay up really late to help them finish. Sometimes until one or two in the morning. At other times I go on all night. I can't go out with my friends. My only fear is that I can't make it into higher education and have to do this for the rest of my life.'⁴

Hayfever and headaches from the inhalation of microscopic fibres in outworker homes⁵ also impact on the family members of outworkers.⁶

The Victorian state government can promote better health amongst the *thousands* of children whose parents undertake outwork in Victoria's western and south eastern suburb by rewarding companies who meet their legal obligations to outworkers, by adopting a model for ethical procurement similar to that of the Queensland State Government. If the Victorian government ensures that no uniform supplier, contractor or subcontractor in Victoria is provided with work through Victorian government procurement unless they are proven to have satisfied their legal obligations to workers across the production and supply chain, it will have taken an important first step to enshrining a safe home environment for outworkers and their children.

Transitional funding:

Just as outworkers' children are most likely to be educated in school communities suffering financial hardship, so too are any stringent procurement policies likely to have greatest impact on poorer school communities. FairWear recognises that schools from across all

² Cregan, C. (2001), *Home Sweat Home: Preliminary Findings of the First Stage of a Two-Part Study of Outworkers in the Textile Industry in Melbourne, Victoria*, Melbourne, University of Melbourne.

³ ³ Mayhew, C. and M. Quinlan (1998), *Outsourcing and Occupational Health and Safety: A Comparative Study of Factory-Based and Outworkers in the Australian TCF Industry*. Sydney, Industrial Relations Research Centre, University of NSW ,

⁴ Cregan, C. (2001).

⁵ Mayhew, C. and M. Quinlan (1998), pg 102

⁶ "Heart on the Sleeve" from the Documentary series *Fearless: Stories from Asian Women*, Film Australia, 2001

regions and socio-economic backgrounds have demonstrated a commitment to the rights of outworkers.

It is imperative therefore that school councils and communities are provided with any necessary transitional funding to meet any increased costs arising from these recommendations.

Recommendation

- The Victorian government should ensure that subsidies and transitional funding are provided to school councils and communities in less affluent communities to ensure that poorer school communities are not further financially burdened by ethical procurement policies.