

Child care no crisis, says minister [AU] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The child care shortage was exaggerated, Howard Government minister Larry Anthony claimed yesterday, saying waiting lists had blown out because parents were signing up at multiple centres.

As a result, the Federal Government would consider offering fewer than the 40,000 childcare places originally planned in the May budget.

Despite warnings by parents and child care groups that waiting lists are ballooning, Mr. Anthony has retreated from his own claims that the situation is dire.

A leaked cabinet submission shows Mr. Anthony proposed an increase of nearly 40,000 places, but only 10,000 extra outside-school-hours places and 2500 family daycare places, including about 4000 playgroup places, were announced late last year.

Judy Finlason, co-ordinator of the Network of Community Activities in NSW, a leading body for after-school services, said Mr. Anthony had "outraged" parents desperate for a place.

"It's not the case for school-age places because they must be in or close to the school and parents need to know that there's some way for their child to get safely from their school to the centre so there's not many possibilities for them to be putting themselves on lots of lists," she said.

Ms. Buck, whose seven-week-old baby Thomas has been on a waiting list for the university child care centre since before he was conceived, said she had not listed her son at multiple centres because she needed child care that was close to where she studied. However, she knew through friends that all the centres in the Tweed area were also full.

Mr. Anthony rejected the accusation the Government was acting to maximize the political advantage from an announcement to provide more child care places.

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