



## **Power to go on strike will be 'crucial' for childcare workers: minister**

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**Highlight:** Childcare workers will be able to use strike action as a bargaining chip in multi-employer deals under Labor's employment bill designed to drive up wages.

### **Body**

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Early Childhood Education Minister Dr **Anne Aly** said a new ability for childcare workers to use strike action as a bargaining chip in multi-employer deals is crucial leverage in the fight for better pay.

The controversial wages bill Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke wants to ram through the lower house this week gives workers in low-paid, female-dominated jobs such as early learning and aged care the right to launch industrial action across several employers to help secure higher incomes.

[Link to Image](#)

Alex Ellinghausen

Academics and union leaders hosed down the prospect of multi-employer bargaining leading to widespread strikes during a parliamentary inquiry into the government's Secure Jobs, Better Pay bill last week following outcry from business leaders over the economic impact of the reforms.

After a roundtable with the Independent Education Union in Sydney on Friday, Aly told this masthead the new right for childcare workers to undertake industrial action in multi-employer bargaining was "incredibly crucial".

"It just makes it a lot more effective," Aly said, highlighting how workers would be able to bargain across employers grouped by location or the nature of the enterprise. "It's going to provide a much more effective bargaining system for the early education and childcare sector."

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Burke have singled out childcare and aged care as among the most important beneficiaries of the reforms.

Business leaders argue the sweeping workplace law changes will empower unions to trigger industry-wide strikes and rope employers into pay deals without their consent.

Australian Industry Group head Innes Willox said: "If this right to strike proposal gets up across the childcare sector, its proponents can explain to parents why their children won't get care due to widespread industrial action, and why workers don't get paid as they are forced not to work."

## Power to go on strike will be 'crucial' for childcare workers: minister

"If the government wants childcare, aged care and disability sectors to be paid substantially more, they simply will have to pay for it, since these are sectors principally supported by government funding," he said.

Early Childhood **Australia** chief executive Samantha Page said the "masculine, adversarial" notion around striking didn't necessarily translate to a female-dominated sector where staff developed close, working relationships with children and families.

"Walking off a building site is one thing, but walking out of an aged-care or early learning centre is a different thing," Page said.

Under the bill, the Fair Work Commission will be able to force the government to take part in multi-employer wage deal negotiations for sectors it heavily funds, including aged care and childcare.

Early educators want their pay to match similar roles in primary schools, which would mean a 30 per cent increase in most categories. Asked whether the government was willing to be party to those wage deals, Aly said it was a matter for the industrial umpire.

The government is also being pressed to urgently fund an interim, 10 per cent pay rise to stop workers leaving the sector - which is suffering more than 7000 vacancies a month - ahead of its cheaper childcare reforms that will add to staffing pressures by increasing demand.

Aly said retention issues couldn't be fixed with Band-Aid or short-term solutions but there were "low-hanging fruit" stop-gaps, such as skilled migration, that could address the shortfall immediately.

"We're working with the sector to look at what we can do in the short-, medium- and long-term," she said. "It's something this government has put as a priority."

In welcoming the [Fair Work decision to award aged-care workers an interim 15 per cent pay rise](#) on Saturday, Albanese said wages had been held back in feminised industries because of the lack of bargaining power.

"It's an important decision, it's just a couple more stages to go, but it's a sign that the Fair Work Commission understands how important it is," he said.

The government has promised to fund the wage rise for aged-care workers. Asked how much it would cost during a press conference, the Prime Minister replied there were further stages to the Fair Work process.

"I can say that we allowed for a contingency in the budget that was handed down on Tuesday night two weeks ago because we anticipated a wage increase coming through," he said, adding the government didn't declare the amount.

## Graphic

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Minister for Early Childhood Education Dr **Anne Aly** empowering childcare workers to strike is crucial.

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