

SAFEGUARDS WELCOME BUT DON'T STOP KIDS WORKING

The benefits of a first job are much more valuable than the extra cash in a teenager's pocket.

Entering the workforce teaches a child responsibility, instils work ethic from a young age and hammers home the value of a hard-earned dollar.

Kids showing initiative and working not only enjoy the independence and financial freedom of having their own money, but learn early on invaluable life skills.

That being said, there are obvious risks posed to children who take up work.

Some are overworked, underpaid or exploited.

The confidence needed to stand up for oneself in the workplace often eludes adults with years of experience so it is easy to see how a child could be taken advantage of.

As a result, many young people report feeling pressured into working even when they have declined a shift.

More concerning is some feeling pressured to work when they are sick.

Almost 20 per cent of kids working in retail report being shouted or sworn at by a customer, while 10 per cent said they had received the same abuse from a manager.

Regardless of the job, the worker's experience or their competence, no child should be treated in such a way, let alone in the workplace where they are simply trying to get a leg up.

It is because of this inexcusable treatment that Children's Commissioner Helen Connolly has looked seriously at what can be done to ensure kids are protected at work.

Among Ms Connolly's recommendations are instating a minimum working age in South Australia, requiring parental consent for a child working in a

physically demanding or risky role and mandating work readiness courses in schools from Year 9 onwards.

She is not alone in calling for safeguards, with the retail workers' union urging the state government to consider following Victoria's lead and implement a minimum working age of 13.

Exploring every possible avenue to ensure kids are as safe as possible at work is a non-negotiable, but the measures must not go as far as preventing entrepreneurial and keen children from working hard to make their own luck.

With skilled labour shortages likely to worsen in the future, stopping kids from following a pathway to potentially plug those holes should be avoided.

As should preventing opportunities that more often than not come for those willing to have a go regardless of age.