

20 April 2018

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC  
Chairman  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Via email: [env@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:env@parliament.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Chairman

**PETITION NO. 050 – MOORA RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE**

We write jointly as the Principal Petitioner and Tabling Member with respect to petition No. 050 tabled on 3 March, 2018 in the Legislative Council and thank you and the committee for the opportunity to make a submission.

This petition follows an earlier petition considered by the committee (Petition No. 029) which similarly raises concern about the future of the Moora Residential College and the impact on local education opportunity within the Central Midlands region. Notably since Petition No. 029 was tabled on 12 October 2017 the State Government has taken a decision to close the Moora Residential College at the end of the 2018 school year. This submissions intends to build upon the previous submissions made by us in response to Petition No. 029.

The Moora Residential College (formerly St James Residential College), is an important education facility in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia. In fact it is the only residential boarding facility located alongside a Senior High School (Central Midlands Senior High School) between the metropolitan area and Geraldton, providing a local and affordable residential boarding option for secondary students.

The petition calls upon the Legislative Council to 'examine the effect of the closure of the Moora Residential College on the educational opportunities for students and consider the impact on their families'. It is our view that the college's closure will undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on the students and families in the Central Midlands region and indeed across the State, as well as ramifications for the local Moora economy and impacts on the Central Midlands Senior High School.

The State Government handed down its first budget since the change of government on Thursday 7 September 2017 and in doing so made a decision to abandon a budget commitment of the former Liberal-National Government for a major refurbishment of the college in 2018. On Wednesday 13 December 2017 the Minister for Education announced by way of media statement that the Moora and Northam Residential College's would close at the end of the 2018 school year as part of a suite of education savings measures<sup>1</sup>. On Thursday 11 January 2018 the Premier and Minister for Education announced that many of these measures had been reversed however the Moora Residential College was still to close<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2017/12/Education-savings-measures-to-help-contribute-to-budget-repair.aspx>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2018/01/Getting-the-balance-right-Education-savings-measures-reversed.aspx>

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During the period between 7 September 2017 and 13 December 2017 it was the government's position that the Moora Residential College would remain open and that it would receive funding to undertake the most urgent repairs and maintenance. Many questions were asked during budget estimates and within the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council in relation to the college during this period which have been highlighted in our submission to Petition No. 029. The government intended to commission consultants to scope and cost the works required to keep the college open, however following significant questioning and an application under the *Freedom of Information Act 1992* it is now clear that for some reason consultants were not engaged to undertake the assessments fully and the only report the government received was an assessment of the college's fire safety.

There are many matters for the committee to consider in relation to the Moora Residential College which include, but are not limited to:

- The costs to close the college including maintaining the asset in a vacant state or disposing of the asset, severance of staff, commitments to relocate students and support families in their transition, and additional bus routes may actually outweigh the costs to maintain and operate the college;
- The government's 'strategic' approach to the placement of residential colleges will leave a significant gap in the Central Midlands Region and compromise education opportunity for local students;
- The impact on Central Midlands Senior High School by the loss of almost 30 students from the school directly related to the closure of the college which will undoubtedly constrain the schools resources and ability to offer a varied educational program; and
- The economic impact on the local Moora community and region as the college is a significant contributor directly as an employer of several staff and indirectly through the procurement of goods and services.

The committee could also assist the Legislative Council by calling expert witnesses to provide a contemporary assessment, independent of government, on the college's condition. Despite numerous attempts the Minister for Education has refused access to the college for a new independent assessment to be undertaken, instead claiming that earlier reports whilst independent were predicated upon a \$8.7 million commitment by the former government to the Moora Residential College.

Since our last submission the Shire of Moora commissioned Lucid Economics to undertake an Economic Impact Assessment of the decision to close the Moora Residential College. For the committee's reference we attach a copy of that report which concludes that the direct and indirect impact of the college closure will result in 19 job losses and reduction of \$2 million in gross regional product. This impact is clearly significantly greater than the annual operating subsidy provided by the State Government.

The Education and Health Standing Committee's report '*Putting VET to the Test*', tabled in the Legislative Assembly in November 2017 noted constraints on VET students in regional areas to be a particular concern. The report acknowledged that the offering of available VET courses is limited by the ability of regional schools to attract and retain VET qualified staff. Graduating teachers are not qualified to deliver VET courses and must first complete a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. There are further issues associated with these staff maintaining current industry qualifications when located in a non-Metropolitan area. The loss of the Moora Residential College cohort of students will dramatically impact the ability of Central Midlands Senior High School to offer a variety of VET courses that align with available workplace training opportunities.

By almost every benchmark, study and report regional education outcomes are typically inferior to those in metropolitan environments. Most markedly, regional students are less likely to study ATAR subjects and less likely to seek and gain access to university in order to attain a tertiary qualification. It is critical that educational facilities like the Moora Residential College and Central Midlands Senior High School are retained and are strengthened, not diminished off the back of a plan for education savings with no regard for the impact on the students of this region.

**Hon Martin Aldridge MLC** Member for the Agricultural Region  
**Shane Love MLA** Member for Moore

We implore the committee to more fully consider the matters surrounding the closure of the Moora Residential College and to report to the Legislative Council on its findings. If we can assist the committee in any way please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely



**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE MLC**  
Member for the Agricultural Region



**MR SHANE LOVE MLA**  
Member for Moore

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