

Parents fight big fines for truancy

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EDUCATION REPORTER

PARENTS are making a last-ditch effort to convince the State Government to abandon proposed expiation notices for truancy, saying it will trivialise and even worsen the problem.

The fines, which could be set as high as \$750, are embedded in legislation that has passed the House of Assembly.

A key parent group is arranging meetings with Legislative Council crossbenchers in a bid to quash the move, which the Liberal Party also opposes. The Education Department currently has to take parents of chronically truant children to court to penalise them. Two recent prosecutions were the first in 20 years.

The department said expiation notices would be issued only after significant efforts, such as "family conferences", have been made to resolve the issue with parents.

But director of parent group the SA Association of State School Organisations, David Knuckey, said it was more likely children missed school because of "the bullying epidemic and lack of resources for special needs students" than because "parents cannot be bothered taking them".

"Fines will not solve any of these other issues," he said.

"These fines could actually encourage the wrong behaviour and trivialise school absenteeism. We shouldn't be treating children missing out on an education the same way

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But he was not opposed to the continued use of the courts as a last resort when families have become "completely disengaged" from the education system. "(That) could compel some families to re-engage in the mediation process to get their children back into school," he said.

The Government wants to lift maximum court-imposed penalties from \$500 to \$5000.

A SAASSO survey earlier this year found overwhelming majorities of parents and school staff opposed both expiation notices and the raising of court-imposed penalties.

Opposition education spokesman John Gardner hoped crossbenchers would reject the "speeding fine (style) expiation fee approach".

A department spokesman said the Bill "broadens the options in dealing with parents who condone their child's non-attendance".

The expiation amount would be subject to consultation and set in regulations following the passage of the Bill through Parliament.



BURN: Sharyn Bals and Errol Chlmer want to get back to selling sausages at Port Mall.

Picture: CALUM ROBERTSON

Charity sausage sizzle hits a snag at centre

ASHLEIGH PISANI
PORTSIDE MESSENGER

AFTER eight years of running barbecues in the Port Mall complex, Largs Bay Rotary Club has been told to pack up its tongs and go home – putting vital charity work at risk.

The club – which has operated its weekly sausage sizzle at Romeo's Foodland in Port Adelaide for four and a half years – was kicked off its regular spot last month by the centre's management.

Club secretary Marie Jackson said they had been told the

barbecues "disadvantage" the mall's tenants.

But none of the businesses approached said they were bothered by the fundraising sizzles. And Romeo's manager, Sidney Phillips, who said he was ordered by centre owner Leedwell to tell the club to move on, said he would always welcome them back.

Ms Jackson said two Rotarians working on the barbecue were shocked when they were told, without warning, to pack up and leave immediately.

The expulsion, she said, had jeopardised the club's charity

programs, including one that funds repairs to second-hand wheelchairs donated to disadvantaged communities.

"The wheelchair restoration project will be in doubt if we are unable to obtain regular income to cover the costs of tyres – \$1350 per 50 – to keep doing this very humanitarian work," Ms Jackson said.

The club made about \$300 a week from the barbecues, selling 150 sausages at \$2 each.

Many traders rejected the centre owner's accusation that the sizzle "disadvantages" them. They said the barbecue

did not have a negative impact on trade. Mr Phillips hoped the club might return.

"It's good for the community, it's good for the Rotary, it's good for us," he said.

The Rotary Club has found a new home for its barbecues outside Coles in the Port Canal Shopping Centre but will not be able to book the site every week as other organisations host barbecues there as well. "We had a regular clientele at (Romeo's)," Ms Jackson said.

Leedwell was approached for comment but did not respond by press deadline.