



JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON AUSTRALIA'S FAMILY LAW SYSTEM

Public Hearing – Wednesday 19 August 2020
Via videoconference, Parliament House, Canberra

Clarification of interrupted evidence from Family and Relationship Services Australia

Question No.	Hansard page/written	Asked by	Question
1	p. 3	Senator Hanson	Senator HANSON: Correct. So, if the parent doesn't turn up with the child at all, do you have any input in making that information—that they have actually contravened the orders—available to the courts, or don't you have anything to do with that? Do you only do personal contact with the child and the parent who are there, who do have the opportunity to see their children? You don't get involved in doing a report that the other parent never turned up? Do you have to go through the ICL, who should know if a parent is not sending the child to the contact centre? What I'm actually saying is that parents out there are basically waiting for months to see their children. They are distraught, they are distressed, they are financially broken, and even to go to contact centres has a big impact on them. Then they have to turn around and go back to the courts because the other parent has said: 'I'm not taking the child to the contact centre. That's your hard luck. That's your problem.' What backing and support do these parents get from your organisation to actually then say—

Answer:

The role of the CCS is to facilitate contact between children and parents. The CCS does not have an enforcement role. Before accepting families into the service, the CCS' assess the parents' willingness and capacity to take part in the process. They also assess the child's readiness to take part. In other words, they try as much as possible to ensure that parents are going to abide by a service agreement before accepting them into the service. And, their focus is always on the best interests of the child – is the child safe? Is the child ready? If a parent doesn't turn up, that failure to attend is recorded. Reports for courts are provided on written request – for example a request from an ICL or other legal or court appointed expert.

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2	p. 6	Ms Zali Steggall MP	Ms Steggall asked: One of the areas I found interesting in your submission was you touched on that there be an earlier intervention with your services with maybe assisting resolution of dispute or assisting contact. Can you expand a little bit more [on your submission] where you touched on, for example, there being an early involvement of services like yours. Of course, that would involve an early intervention, but funding and resources would be an issue—is there a model or way in which you see early intervention could be happening as something better than it is at the moment?”

Answer:

We’d like to see family relationship and family law matters approached through the lens of a public health model that prioritises prevention and early intervention and in so doing looks not only at the legal issues but also works to assist families find the supports and solutions they need to deal with the broader range of social and economic issues they are facing. This already happens to some extent, but we’d like to see for example, wrap around services to deal with the range of issues that families might present with – family violence, mental health issues, alcohol or drug abuse and so on.