

28th March 2023

Dear Parliamentary Committee,

Submission re: Governor-General Amendment (Cessation of Allowances in the Public Interest) Bill 2023.

My name is Hetty Johnston. I founded Bravehearts Foundations Ltd in 1997 as a vehicle to break the silence on child sexual assault after harm experienced by our then 7 year old daughter.

The sexual assault of children was not an issue I knew anything about at that time but, once I researched it and then did know, I could not turn my back on what I then knew, were thousands of children whose life trajectories were being derailed and destroyed by sexual predators. Meanwhile, those that should have been protecting them chose instead to ignore them, directing all their compassion and protection toward the predators and the institutions they hid behind.

My passion in this space has not dissipated since then, nor will it ever. My involvement with this particular issue is on the public record. It is myself that first called for the resignation of Peter Hollingworth as Governor General of Australia and it was I who pursued it for many years until he eventually resigned.

I was not gunning for the man, I was targeting the cultural behaviour of organisations ignoring children who had been sexually assaulted, of not providing assistance to them and their families and electing instead to protect and support the offenders and the institutions in which they operated.

My interest in this particular issue follows my involvement in this campaign.

I intend this to be a brief submission.

I fully support this Bill. It appears to be blindingly obvious that taxpayers should not be forced to pay any Governor-General, current or past, who engages in criminal acts, serious misconduct, or another cessation event. It is simply unacceptable.

The Governor-General is currently the highest appointment in the land. It is not an elected position but rather one attained based on the person's universally recognised meritorious contributions to society. As Governors-General, they represent the Australian community - me, my daughter, and our family - throughout the world. The person who holds this position must be of exemplary character.

Proof of community expectations in this regard can clearly be seen by virtue of the condemnation placed on former GG Peter Hollingworth where 80% of Australians agreed he should be dismissed after the exposure of his handling of disclosures of child sexual abuse whilst in the Anglican Church.

If it is found that a Governor-General has betrayed the trust and character expectations placed on them by virtue of his or her appointment, then that Governor-General should be disqualified from holding the position, and from attaining any financial or another benefit for having held the role. This would include any spouse entitlements or those of other dependent family members.

I simply cannot envisage a circumstance where this would not be the case.

It seems transparent, fair and democratic that a House of Parliament would need to pass a resolution to decide if a Ministerial declaration to cease payment was to occur.

I am very pleased to not 4AGB (6) provides that serious misconduct includes an omission and is timeless in terms of when and where the action, inaction or omission occurred.

In closing, I take this opportunity to commend Senator Shoebridge for introducing this Bill and the Parliamentary Committee for considering it.

Hetty Johnston AM MAICD

Safeguarding People Australia