

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this submission as a concerned grandparent.

My grandchild is court ordered to attend access with an abusive father.

It is my experience in the family law system that it enables abusive behaviour.

Key changes I support

* Broadening the definition of ‘family violence’ to include a wider range of behaviour and removing the objective test of “reasonableness” so that family violence can be properly considered whenever the victim actually fears for their safety. I also see it as extremely important to include *all* types of violence and abuse – there is not one that is more valid or defensible than the other.

Any sort of abuse against women and children is wrong. Inclusion of emotional abuse indicators and examples within the definition of “family violence” need to be included and would go a long way in protecting abuse victims.

* Prioritising family violence when considering what is in the best interests of the child

* Removing the friendly parent provision

* Taking children’s rights into account – children have the right to live and be cared for in a safe environment free from drug and alcohol abuse, yet they will not be granted this right unless they are physically harmed while being in the unsafe environment.

* A broader definition and understanding of child abuse

Further changes that are needed

I believe that there are a number of changes needed immediately that have not been addressed in the Bill. I urge you to consider amendments to:

* The presumption of equal shared parental responsibility.

* The concept of equal shared parental responsibility.

* The link between equal shared parental responsibility and equal time/substantial and significant time arrangements.

* The “one size fits all” approach in which it is assumed that equal time and substantial and significant time arrangements are best for children. Each child and the situation in which they come from are entirely different. What works for one will not work for another and every case should be handled with sensitivity and much thought for that individual child’s best interests.

In conclusion

I urge the Federal Government to act now in response to the evidence-based research the Federal Government commissioned in the past 24 months and the promises the Government has made to address the serious problem of family violence in the family law system. I strongly recommend the Federal Government pass this Bill expeditiously with my suggested amendments.

I thank you for considering my submission.

Regards