

EMAIL TO: [legcon.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:legcon.sen@aph.gov.au)

22/04/2011

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committees  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

**Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill**

I am writing to express my support for the changes to the *Family Law Act* proposed in the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011, and to recommend that further changes be made to the Bill to ensure that the family law system does not jeopardise the safety of children and parents who are victims of violence.

I strongly support the measures proposed in the Bill to provide better protections for people who have experienced family violence within the family law system and believe that the proposed amendments are essential to placing the safety and protection of children and family members at the forefront of the *Family Law Act*.

The presumption of equal shared parenting doesn't work. Most men I have spoken to view this as a time percentage of 50%. If they do not have the child with them for exactly this time, then there is cause for dispute. It is not about the children, it is about the father.

Children do not have a voice and neither do women who find themselves in these situations. Women are fearful of men who view the presumption this way. Women are acutely aware of the need for the child to spend time with the father, but not with an abusive man who on the surface appears to be the caring responsible parent, but underneath, he has the children way down his list of what is important in life.

It is all about revenge. Many men retain extreme bitterness towards the woman who has "taken my kids away". While there are some women who hold this view, in my experience it is not common. Many men who are bitter towards the mother of their children will go to great lengths to continue the persecution, and they know the best way is through the children. That is generally the way of bringing the woman down.

### **Support for key changes**

In particular, I strongly support:

- Broadening the definition of 'family violence' to include elements of coercion and control, 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

- A broader definition and understanding of child abuse that includes exposure to violence
- Prioritising family violence when considering what is in the best interests of the child
- Removing the 'facilitation' aspects of the 'friendly parent provision'
- Repealing section 117AB about costs orders relating to false allegations or denials of Violence

### **Further changes that are needed**

I believe that a number of further changes are necessary to better protect the safety of children and their family in the family law system. In particular, I recommend that:

- The safety and protection of children should be prioritised above all else. Its priority should not be subject to proving an inconsistency with other considerations.
- The Act should make it clear that exposure to family violence is a form of family violence and that it applies to behaviour by the person perpetrating violence, and not the victim of the violence.
- There should be no presumptions in family law – every family should be treated as unique. This means that there should be no presumption of equal shared parental responsibility and the courts should not be required to start from any particular care arrangement.
- The Act should protect the safety of the primary carer as this increases children's safety.

### **Conclusion**

Based on my own experiences and the evidence presented in numerous research reports over the last few years, I strongly recommend you support the amendments suggested in this letter and the expeditious passage the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011.

Yours sincerely,