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Secretary

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 1 August 2003 7:29 PM
To: Committee, FCA (REPS)
Subject: Submission to a Parliamentary Committee Inquiry re. Child custody arrangements in the event of family separation



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Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
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Dear Sir / Madam

I am contacting you in regards to your inquiry into child custody arrangements. I am a 40 yo single father of one - a 5 yo boy [REDACTED]. I have had equal shared care of [REDACTED] for almost 3 years now. This arrangement was instigated on the advice of my ex partner's uncle, who is an ex family law solicitor. I thank him for this advice, as I was in no state, after my partner left me, to understand and organise legal events surrounding the custody of [REDACTED]. My arrangement with [REDACTED] is that I have him from

- Friday 5pm - Tuesday 5pm on one week &
- Sunday 8.30am - Wednesday 8.30am the next week

This continues each week 4 days, 3 days, 4 days, 3 days, etc. The arrangement also included that [REDACTED] could not live outside of the metropolitan area (as advised by her uncle). The daily/weekly arrangement of [REDACTED] is flexible - Christmas holidays etc, I might take to see my family in Queensland and my ex-partner is given catch up time either before or after our return.

This of course is also able to be done by either partner providing no prior arrangements/appointments are not clashing.

The beauty of this I have found is that being of a gentle nature I am not able to be taken advantage of by my ex-partner. [REDACTED] has a set structure (& so do I), it would have "killed" me if [REDACTED] mother had gone and lived in [REDACTED] (which she was going to do and I reside in the family house in [REDACTED]) - I would have had to drop/or pick up [REDACTED] from her residence & get to work on time. Now that [REDACTED] is attending school he would have more than likely been going to school up there. This would have further jeopardised my quality time with him. I must point out that I am one of these "domestically adept" males that

2/08/2003

are sensitive & skilled enough to give their child love, warmth, nutrition, etc.

I must admit it is hard at times being a single parent, but it has its rewards. The depression of being suddenly left, the initial feeling of isolation (that is a male thing) & the stigma of being a single parent. I especially found it hard at work....I am an engineer, a predominantly male-dominated domain (unfortunately) - the times I had turned up late to work because my son had wet the bed, had a bad night or was sick, never seemed to be understood & the feeling of guilt was always there looming. So much so that I have recently given up a promising career with that company & started with another one - so that I can at least spend time with Jack, drop him off to school & share breakfast with him. The fact that I have been going to work & not spending more time with my son for the past 3 years has been an issue with me, a guilt reinforced by my ex-partner who accuses me of not actually spending 50% of my time with [REDACTED] etc. What is a single parent to do. I will not & can not go on the single parent pension or dole. My ex-partner is "street-wise" regarding the pension system (Centrelink, etc) even to the point where she has asked me in the past to lie to Centrelink - to say that I have [REDACTED] less time so that she gets more in here pension - of course, I refused to lie to Centrelink - it's not the way I was brought up. There is also the issue of her claiming single parent benefit whilst her partner is living there, but this is another matter. I have been aware of it for the last 2-1/2 years but have hesitated in reporting it in fear of repercussions from her in general & in regard to my custody of [REDACTED]. There has been numerous times she has threatened to go to court to change custody....

I have probably rambled on & slightly off the track. Due to my easy going & sensitive nature I have kept a diary for the past 3 years regarding events with my [REDACTED]. I have done it mainly to cover myself in the event of being falsely accused of being a bad father. I know I am not a bad father, but do get taunted by my ex-wife which of course eventually lowers my self esteem. I have been actively involved with [REDACTED] childcare, swimming (drown proofing) & various other activities. My son's social agenda is better than mine 8th). What I do think is that my diary offers an insight into a single parent's life regarding shared care & it is available for your report. I am also probably better at communicating in person, than on paper as there is so much I could discuss from child support, legal events & availability of resources to single fathers.

I do hope you read this & that it is not too late for me to be of some assistance. I am more than happy to be contacted for clarification or further discussion on this matter. I think the government is doing a great & brave thing in investigating this matter further. Unfortunately a lot of men fall to depression, suicide, gambling, self-neglect, female phobia, anger, etc after the breakdown of their marriage. This of course is not true in all cases, especially of men that leave the marriage. It has been said that the person that leaves the marriage is at least six months ahead & has made the decision well in advance of the time when they actually leave. Which is why, as in my case, it is such a shock.

I must state that I am not a violent person, I'm more of a SNAG. I was brought up with good values, work hard, don't use the system & be honest.

Anyway I won't rattle on.

Yours sincerely