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Secretary	

31 July 2003

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

For the past seven months my husband and I have watched our son degenerate from a proud and happy new father into a sad, hurt, lonely, depressed and disillusioned parent, his lost baby constantly on his mind. He requested updated information on his son from his former partner once a week by phone, but she has refused.

I have phoned the Solicitor at the Community Legal Centre [redacted] who told me to get in touch with Legal Aid to request contact for my husband and me as grandparents, however my son's ex-partner has already been to Legal Aid so they refused to help me as there's "a conflict" whatever that means? They said I could go to a private solicitor or the Family Law Court which could take about five months, I doubt we could afford the fees as we are retired pensioners.

Our grandson had his first birthday two days ago. I lived in hope that his mother would let us see him on his special day but unfortunately it didn't happen. She did however contact my son and said he could meet them in the park where he was able to give his little boy all our family presents and watch him ride on the toy motorbike he had bought him. When he took six steps towards him and noticed that he has about five teeth he was thrilled. Twenty seven minutes later the mother said "we've got to go now" as though in charge of all proceedings, leaving our son with a small taste of what could be.

The only time we have had contact has been:

1. 26 September 2002 - at my daughter's home with her husband and their twin girls, also born in July 2002, this visit lasted for about one hour.

2. 20 December 2002 - at a sidewalk cafe for 30 minutes to give our grandson and his brother their Christmas gifts before they flew to Melbourne with their mother to visit her family for four weeks.
3. 6 February 2003 - for 20 minutes in a cafe where I met my grandson and his mother alone, she agreed to take a couple of photos of us together.
4. 10 July 2003 - when I drove 45 km to her home on my own to ask if we could get together for his first birthday. She said no and asked me to leave, refusing my request to nurse my grandson. I told her I intended to get some legal advice on how I could have contact as a grandparent on a regular basis. She told me I hadn't got a hope then threatened to move to Melbourne with the boys

During the past 12 months my son, my daughter and I have repeatedly tried to make contact by phone but she lets it ring out and whenever we ring back the phone is engaged, presumably off the hook.

This is just a brief outline of what has been happening to our family in the event of family separation and clearly shows that no time has been allowed for my son to be with his baby let alone do any of the parenting. Our daughter and her family have not had contact with their nephew and cousin since September 2002 and my husband and I have not been able to watch the progress of our grandson growing up.

I urge the Committee to look closely at the concept of equal time to be spent by children with each parent after family separation as I believe currently it is very one sided, the mother holding the upper hand.

Also contact rights for grandparents and other interested parties in childrens' welfare are of paramount importance when dealing with custody arrangements, enabling children to know their background, heritage and genetic make up as well as the love of their extended family.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area of the letter.