

Submission No 27

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs **Inquiry Into Crime in the Community: victims, offenders, and fear of crime**

From: Phillip Gunnell, 2 Derrick Street, Campbell, Canberra, ACT 2612

Home Telephone: (02) 62471387

Individual Submission – Crime Against Property

Summary

- Experienced a Break and Enter on 15 June 1994 to personal domestic dwelling (stolen property \$3,350) and 10 May 2000 to personal domestic dwelling (stolen property approximately \$13,000)
- Claim on Home Contents Insurance
- Expense incurred to fund extra measures to secure house and property
- Cost to the community: Police resources, insurance premiums, engenders a climate of mistrust in the community, suspicion of strangers
- Inhibition on taking short breaks and long holidays away from home

Submission

I wish to submit to the Inquiry into Crime my personal experiences in being a victim of two break and enter to my home.

Please consider that I have been a full time officer of the Royal Air Force (1962 to 1977) and the Royal Australian Air Force (1977 to 2000). During that time my wife and I have lived at twenty three addresses in five countries. The first break and enter occurred on the 15 June 1994 at 32 Holyoake Court, Hillbank, Adelaide SA 5112 whilst I was serving at RAAF Base Edinburgh. I was out of the house on duty at the RAAF Base and my wife was out working as a volunteer hospital worker. Our house was secured and the thief (16 year old boy) broke a window to gain entry. Property to the value of \$3,350 was removed from the house. The second occasion took place between midday Wednesday 10 May 2000 and midday Thursday 11 May 2000 at our home 2 Derrick Street, Campbell, Canberra, ACT 2612. My wife and I were away on a caravan holiday. Our house was secured and the thief or thieves had to break a window to gain entry. Property to the value of \$13,000 was removed.

Fortunately we were insured and we claimed on our Home Contents insurance policy. However, whilst we were financially recompensed nothing could replace those items of sentimental value that were never recovered.

We had always ensured that our house, garage and sheds were locked and we have two security screens to our front door and side door. However as a result of the second burglary and the fact that we were living in our own home we spent a considerable amount of money to fit motion lights around the house, another security door to our rear French doors and a back to base burglar alarm. In addition to the financial outlay we have now incurred a monthly fee (\$45.00) to support the back to base monitoring. In return we do receive a discount on the NRMA Home Contents Insurance premium. As a result of the second break and enter I wrote to Gary Humphries MLA (at the time Minister for Justice and Community Safety) at the ACT Legislative Assembly expressing my disquiet at the increasing levels of break and enter in my suburb of

Campbell. Our local Police Force tries hard to combat property crime and occasionally, when running special operations, or focusing on the bail act, manage to reduce the level of break and enter. However, when the Police ease the pressure (through lack of resources) the number of break and enter offences begin to escalate.

The effect on the Campbell community is significant. I am in touch with my near neighbours and I also attend the monthly Campbell Neighbourhood Watch Committee. Therefore, I am fully aware of the monthly ACT Police crime statistics for Campbell.

Property crime erodes our community spirit and creates a climate of suspicion towards those people seen walking around our suburb who are not known to us. Particularly young males (16yrs to 25yrs). My wife and I despite all of the additional security measures we have taken are now reluctant to leave the house for any length of time. The only security measures left to further secure our house is to install metal shutters or bars to the windows and fitting a steel mesh throughout ceiling/roof cavity. However, we have no wish to turn our house into a mini fortress as the external appearance of a fortified home is a sign of defeat to the criminals and should not be the 'Australian Way'.

My wife and I are in our fifties and relatively fit so at this stage we do not fear for our physical safety but having experienced two break and enters we have become disillusioned in the apparent ineptness of the community to combat property crime. We are of course not just referring to our own direct experiences but the corrosive effect of neighbourhood vandalism, graffiti and property crime against schools and businesses. Our representatives and state public servants work hard utilizing our resources to make for better communities but the new facilities are quickly defaced and spoilt by mindless acts. I also see the effect of neighbourhood crime on older members of our community particularly elderly ladies who live alone; they are most fearful.

We must be more imaginative in detecting and punishing these people who prey on our community. A suitable gradated mix of punishment ranging from community service, prison, public humiliation, deprivation of community privileges (suspension of driving license, restricted movement, denial of certain social monetary benefits, denial of personal mobile phone).

I am willing to be interviewed by the Committee.

PHILLIP GUNNELL