

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs	
Submission No:	919
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Secretary:	.....

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have only found out re the submission to Parliament re Residency Arrangements and CSA. I wish to make a few comments which I know will be to no avail but perhaps it is my way of expressing my disgust with the current system and how it impacts on the lives of families.

I am a single parent with 11 years of age daughter. I have two other daughters who reside with their mother in close proximity. I have been paying child support for the past 16 months and in that time I have had several assessments which are inconsistent. This places a great deal of stress on my daughter and I in terms of our standard of living and endeavouring to budget. I stopped seeing my other two daughters for access in March 2003 because I could not afford to have them on access weekends. I applied to the CSA for a reassessment noting that I wanted a reassessment because I could not afford to see my two daughters. I found the CSA insensitivity to the needs of children unbelievable whereby a Senior Case Officer stated in the report that because I did not see my children anymore I didn't need extra money to buy food. I formally wrote to the CSA and made formal objection and two complaints about the non-client focus attitude of their staff. That was approximately 5 weeks ago and I have had no reply.

I am an Army Reservist and attend training on weekends in order to obtain money to pay my CSA obligation. This is a non-taxable income and I was told would not be used in the assessment. It was used as a measure of gain and I later found out from another person (and there are many in North Queensland both mothers and fathers) that they had recently had a reassessment and their ARES pay was not considered because the person's service was of a voluntary nature. Decisions are apparently based on inconsistent practises of individual Senior Case Officers.

The CSA in Townsville is the most incompetent government agency I have ever dealt with (this being the majority view of many people I come into contact with in North Queensland). The staff have a siege mentality and are not client focussed. They do not return calls and I am at the stage where I now refuse to telephone the staff as they give conflicting views in a most aggressive and condescending manner. It is evident that they lack quality and are not well informed about the legislation. It is a sad situation whereby their mission statement as perceived by clients (more aptly described as victims by many people in the community) is destroying families as opposed to helping families. I intend to further communicate with senior government and formally request that the CSA review the competence of management at the Townsville Office because it is evident by the numerous concerns raised in the

community that the CSA is not a credible organisation. I attest to these concerns as I am a Commonwealth Govt employee working in a client focussed industry and I see clients constantly who have had adverse dealings with the CSA. I advise clients if they do not receive a client-focussed service that they go through their local Federal MP which many are now doing. At least the CSA are compelled to do something. Sadly, incompetence and an ill-informed operational style appear to be characteristic of the Townsville CSA.

For you to better gauge how current government policies impact on families and their quality of life I intend to elect for early retirement in a climate where the government is encouraging people to stay in the workforce longer. I have no choice but to take early retirement in 18 months time when I am 55 years of age and to use my superannuation to pay of my abode and to obtain an indexed pension of \$8500 per year. I will then be able to receive a sole parenting benefit from Centrelink (as discussed with Centrelink). Ironically, I will be financially better off to live an improved quality of life with my daughter without being harassed by the CSA. If my daughter goes to university I am informed that I can seek further assistance from the government. The CSA have stated that I can legally retire having worked for forty years in the workforce and when one thinks of the situation I will not have to pay Medicare levies and all the other little 'add-ons' the current government reaps for its coffers. Do you not think that there is something wrong with a system where a government encourages people to stay longer in the workforce but disadvantages them to such an extent whereby they force them to become a burden to the taxpayer?

In regard to the existing child support formula for both parents in terms of their care of, and contact with, their children, one does not have to be a genius to ascertain that it is unfair. Gauge the key indicators of its success ... the number of complaints levelled at the CSA, the 6 billion dollars in CSA arrears payments, the increasing number of suicides over children's issues, the increasing membership of agencies advocating a better deal for parents lacking access rights, this current parliamentary inquiry, and lastly (which I think is the most obvious) the siege mentality held, the increasing frequency of complaints and the increasing stress claims made by CSA staff. I would hazard a guess that CSA have a high COMCARE premium. I would also hazard a guess to suggest that the fastest growing government agencies are Taxation, Centrelink and CSA in an environment of public service downsizing. These agencies are control agencies with covert mission statements to collect or save the government money. The current government is reactive and the structure lacks foresight in terms of family needs and future population. The CSA 'paints' Centrelink and the Taxation Depts as the 'nasties' while the latter play off CSA ... the type of mentality that is common in schoolyard bullying. The system most definitely needs to be reassessed and must factor in (as a priority) the psychological needs of the children with the financial obligations of both parents being secondary.

I also strongly believe that the time spent with each parent post separation and whether there should be a presumption that children should spend equal time with both parents, is a move in the right direction. The USA Californian model has merit whereby both parents have default shared residency with their children. Granted, this will only work when there is a reasonable degree of amicability in the separation process. However, I firmly believe that the CSA would be one of the main undermining elements for encouraging antagonistic attitudes between parents. Ever

wonder why people are not getting married, why there is a declining birth-rate in Australia, why the biggest growth industry is in the legal sector ... perhaps it is time to look seriously at the priorities of families in terms of the genuine needs of children and the capacity of parents to be responsible in rearing children jointly. If parents bring children into the world then it is their right to rear them and not have governments interfere with draconian measures that encourage parents to shirk their responsibilities (i.e. the CSA). Society has changed and so have our views on the need to change how parents provide the best environment for their children. Let us move away from the past generation of 'do-good' experts, who expounded the views that males were incapable of rearing children, men were violent and abusive whereas women were the better parent. The sociological views on parenting coined in the sixties (and even adhered to today by the Family Court .. YES that is another thesis in itself) are a bit outdated for current societal perceptions of parenting. For those who haven't been made aware as of yet we actually live in the 21st Century.

The role of grandparents is an essential part of the child's development and it is strongly believed that the Committee needs to examine in what circumstances the Court should make orders in relation to contact with other persons such as grandparents. The 'oldies' are a crucial part of the child's development .. necessary role models who evince traditional values and should not be excluded from child rearing regimes.

However, I digress and would like to get back to my views on the inadequacies of the CSA. I strongly suggest that the CSA stop spending taxpayer's money on their glossy mission statements and self-promotions which expound how competent and wonderful they are and better concentrate on a client-focussed service which is more attuned to the needs of families.

For your information,



Wayne Scott.

CC. CSA Townsville  
Federal Member for Herbert  
Federal Opposition Member.

