

## PROTECTION FOR WITNESSES

It is an important part of the inquiry process for committees to hear from a wide range of groups and individuals, who often have very different views about a subject. It is equally important that the evidence given is provided freely and without undue influence from other people.

Anyone making a written submission or giving evidence at a public hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Essentially this means that no legal action can be taken against a person because of what they say during a hearing (the protection does not apply if, after the hearing, a witness repeats statements made in evidence). Parliamentary privilege also means that it is an offence to inflict 'any penalty or injury upon, or deprive of any benefit, another person' on account of evidence they may give before a committee. Similarly it is an offence to influence another person about the evidence they may give, or to try and prevent a person from giving evidence.

If a witness to the inquiry feels that they have been intimidated, threatened or suffered adverse consequences as a direct result of having given evidence to the Committee, they should contact the committee secretariat immediately.

Witnesses may request that they give evidence to the committee in private (*'in camera'*) if they have concerns about the evidence they propose to give, for example privacy issues. Similarly, the Chair or any member of the committee may also request that the hearing be *in camera*, particularly if the evidence reflects adversely on a third person or is subject to legal proceedings. If you have any concerns about giving evidence to the inquiry, please contact the committee secretariat at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss.