

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

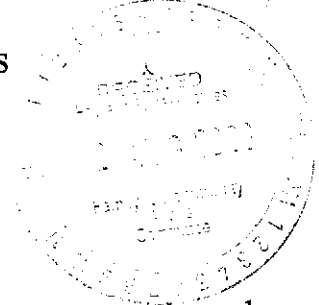
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Secretary:

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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
House Of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Sir / Maddam,

I have been caught in this system for almost ten years and wish to submit some human factor to this topic being debated. I commend the committee for finally getting the go ahead to address this agonising issue and hope that you get given the opportunity to get things right.

I am in favour of shared care of the child, and hope you address this with thought in mind of those already entrenched in this system and not just for future cases. Keep in mind that when couples separate, often the parent with the child / children move to another town and add another hurdle to this issue. The extra cost of travel is not justly off set in the current system, and it is the child who often misses out on seeing one parent due to this. The current system is set up for revenue raising first and foremost, and is unfair for the child / children and non-custodial parent. Travel assistance and accommodation assistance should be provided to the non-custodial parent to maintain contact with the child, especially when there is distance and travel involved.

These things should be set up so as there is no need for a court to be involved unless there is a just overriding reason why the child should not be with a particular parent.

In my case I have a set agreement which raises with CPI. This was ok when I was single and helped with planning and budgeting. Now things have changed and I have remarried and now have two extra children of my own. I'm stuck with this agreement unless my ex agrees to a change, (and that will never happen) so I have to go through court again at my own expense! This system is unfair!

When my son is with me I have to still pay full maintenance, which further stretches the budget and therefore limiting the type of things we can afford to do together. By court order I am limited to a portion of the school holidays with my eleven year old son. Considering

the distance required to travel, it is unpractical to do weekend round trips on a regular basis to maintain contact with my son.

Please address the issue of informing the non custodial parent of his or her rights and make it less expensive to legally obtain fairer access to children and visa versa!

My son is missing out on contact with me through no fault of his own, and I am at a loss as to how I can help him. I have never been late with maintenance payments and do not get my payments garnished, but have been made feel like I'm treated worse than a convicted criminal and punished harsher just for being a caring parent wanting to spend time with my child.

Please don't give this issue lip service and please reframe from continuing to concentrate on revenue raising only. If the revenue is still the foremost issue on this topic, then please look at ways to encourage the custodial parent to work for wages and contribute to the system!

In Summary

- Shared care is good for the child.
- Address these issues with existing cases in mind. (not just future)
- After separation the custodial parent often shifts town (because they can) making it hard for the child to maintain contact with both parents.
- Extra cost of travel and accommodation, not able to claim back fairly in current system. (Unjust!)
- Agreements to be ratified outside court system but fairer for all parties.
- Readdress payment system and reduce charges after tax. (financial strain on family units causes stress for the whole family)
- Avoid paying full amount of maintenance when the child/ children are in non custodial parents care.(during visits)
- Fairer system to maximise child's time with non-custodial parent.
- Government support group for non custodial parent and child (counselling ECT)

Regards, Mark Dunnett.