QCPCA

23 June 2010
Our Reference: 41321

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary,

CYBER SAFETY PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

The Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens' Associations (QCPCA) would like to submit the following for consideration by the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety.

The Queensland Government have recognised the need for consideration to be given to this issue and have formed the Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence (QSAAV). QCPCA are working with the government and other cross sector bodies in Queensland. The Alliance provides independent advice to the Minister for Education and Training in Queensland on effective strategies to respond to issues of bullying and violence in schools. The terms of reference for the Alliance are to:

- Collaborate cross-sectorally to ensure a cohesive and whole of state response to, bullying and violence in schools
- Identify evidence-based best practice across Queensland education sectors, nationally and internationally which may be implemented in Queensland schools
- Provide advice on Queensland's response to the Report: Enhancing Responses to Bullying in Queensland Schools by Dr Ken Rigby
- Make recommendations about the professional development needs of school staff and graduate teacher training in responding to bullying and violence in schools
- Make recommendations on the most effective ways to collaborate with the Australian Government initiatives in relevant areas.

The Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety's Terms of Reference are being considered by QSAAV. We would also like to comment on the following terms of reference:

2. *the nature, prevalence, implications of and level of risk associated with cyber-safety threats, such as:*
   a. abuse of children online (cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and sexual grooming);
   b. exposure to illegal and inappropriate content;
   c. inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment (e.g. technology addiction, online promotion of anorexia, drug usage, underage drinking and smoking);
   d. identity theft; and
   e. breaches of privacy;,

QCPCA are concerned with what appears to be the inability of the Government to monitor social networking sites such as *Facebook* and to act by removing offensive material sites immediately.

Another area of concern is the need for support and information for children that live in rural and remote communities and islands that do not have mobile access. These children are very

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vulnerable as they leave their communities to attend boarding schools and they do not have any experience with cyber bullying.

> 5. *ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying including by:*
> *a. increasing awareness of cyber-safety good practice;*
> *b. encouraging schools to work with the broader school community, especially parents, to develop consistent, whole school approaches; and*
> *c. analysing best practice approaches to training and professional development programs and resources*
> 6. *that are available to enable school staff to effectively respond to cyber-bullying;*
> 7. *analysing information on achieving and continuing world's best practice safeguards;*

We are aware that it is not always possible to block cyber-bullying but we believe that it needs to be made clearer that one of the first steps to be taken should be to block the person sending offensive emails, text messages etc. Direction and assistance should be provided to schools and parents. We believe that this type of information should be featured in a Federal Government advertising program and television would be a good medium through which this could be presented– both during children's viewing time and later at night when parents are watching. There are still many parents who are totally naive to what really happens in the "cyber-world". Just some of the items that could be included are:

- Do you know how to report and block a cyber bully from sending texts to your child's phone?
- Do you know how to report and block an email address from someone sending unacceptable emails to your child?
- Did you know that you should not delete the offensive materials from the phone or computer? – Show it to the police.
- What to do if you find your child has been sending inappropriate texts and emails to another student?
- Did you know that your child might actually have 5 or 6 email addresses that you do not know about?

> 8. *the merit of establishing an Online Ombudsman to investigate, advocate and act on cyber-safety issues; and*
> *(b) Such other matters relating to cyber-safety referred by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy or either House.*

We are supportive of the proposal made in terms of reference point 8, the establishment of an Online Ombudsman to investigate, advocate and act on cyber-safety issues.

QCPCA strongly believe that Parents should be represented on this and any other future reference committee in relation to cyber-bullying and its impact.

Kind regards,

Margaret Black, QCPCA State President

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