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Dr John White
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Parliament House

Dear Dr White

I write in relation to the Inquiry into the Arrangements Surrounding Crimes Committed at Sea. I attach a paper co-authored with Prof Ross Klein, examining the causes of, and influences on, sexual assaults at sea. Our study found that incidents of sexual assault and sexual victimization are significantly more common on cruise ships than on land. Analysis of data from three major cruise lines, comprising more than 50% of the North American-based cruise industry, revealed that perpetrators are most often male crewmembers, victims are most often female passengers, and that the assaults occur almost anywhere, though most frequently in passenger cabins. Our paper examined factors that may be related to the incidence of sexual assaults on cruise ships and concludes with a discussion of the steps cruise lines can take to address the problem.

The terms of reference for this Standing Committee Inquiry are to ‘consider whether improvements could be made in relation to the reporting, investigation and prosecution of alleged crimes committed at sea’, and to ‘examine support available to victims of crime committed at sea’. As noted in the conclusion, it is our view that cruise lines need to adhere to the zero tolerance policy developed in 1999 and rather than just dismissing employees accused of sexual misconduct, ensure they are prosecuted. They must take victim accusations seriously, collect needed evidence, and cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

Although I do not have expertise in legislative processes, I support this inquiry because of my understanding of the frequency and causes of sexual assaults both on land and at sea, and the view that poor jurisdiction over crimes at sea means they are difficult to bring to a satisfactory resolution from the perspective of victims and their families. I submit the view that improvements are needed in relation to the reporting, investigation and prosecution of alleged crimes committed at sea.

I attach the paper 'Sex at Sea: Sexual Crimes Aboard Cruise Ships' for consideration.

Yours sincerely

Jill Poulston, PhD
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