

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

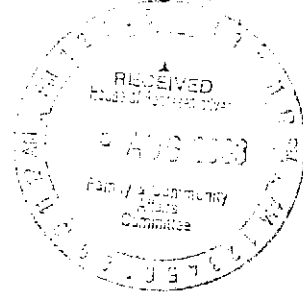
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Secretary: [REDACTED]

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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



CHILD CUSTODY AND ACCESS RIGHTS

Dear Sir/Madam

Last year on 29th July, 2003 my brother and his partner became parents to a healthy baby boy. Both love him as good parents do and so do the rest of our side of the family. Yet, when they separated soon after his birth, the mother refused the father and the father's parents access to the child. As his aunt I have seen him for three brief 20-minute periods over the time but have not seen him in more than 6 months now. I have always been on civil terms with the mother, perhaps because just 12 days before my nephew was born I too gave birth to our twin daughters, and yet she has avoided answering her telephone so I may arrange fair access to the child.

The mother has simply cited that because my mother is bipolar (has manic depression) that she is "sick" and doesn't want the child to have anything to do with us. She accused my brother of being violent and will not allow access unless he is supervised. I am very close to my brother and know for certain that he deeply loves his son and would never do anything to harm him. He dotes on his son so much that this whole affair has changed his outlook on life. He has almost given up on life on more than one occasion and my mother has supported him with daily visits or phone calls to make sure that he is coping. It has been very damaging to our whole family as we are quite old-fashioned and believe that once you have children you have made a commitment to one another and the child/ren for life.

This woman knew all the ropes because she has done this before with her elder son (to another man). She contacted Legal Aid well before we could even gather our confused thoughts thereby blocking my parent's from also using Legal Aid due to a conflict of interests! My poor parents cannot afford high-cost legal bills and nor should they have to. They merely wish to love their grandson and be involved, even if in a small way, in his life.

I find it tragic that the law allows such women to so easily block out an entire 50% of a child's life simply because they believe that a medical condition, which my mother has treatment for, makes that family dangerous to the child. We could understand it if there

had been a documented history of abuse, or neglect that would endanger a child but there has not.

As your Committee will no doubt be discussing, children need a rounded upbringing that includes the love and support of families of both the mother and the father. One parent or the other should not, without due cause, cut off access to an entire family and the child's own history. It has been well-documented in many texts how detrimental it is to a child to have no father in the home. Street crime and waywardness have been strongly linked to the household without a dad, especially with boys. Many books published in the USA deal directly with this topic. Therefore, I ask you to devise a fair child support formula to better allow such men as my brother to see their own child and have more involvement with their upbringing.

My parents and I are also devastated to think that we may one day see our grandson and nephew in the street and he will not even know who we are. This is crushing my parents. Please work on a workable formula of grandparent/great grandparent access rights urgently so that my own may see their lost grandchild as soon as possible.

Finally, please also work on a logical formula of access for all other people in a family who love a child: aunts (like me), uncles, cousins (like my 4 children), siblings, great grandparents, great aunts (all of mine are very hurt by this), great uncles (so are they) and any other blood-relative who would have a wonderful spot in a child's life as they grow up and blossom. It is all too late once they have grown up to try to "catch up". Children need constant input into their lives in their formative years to grow into whole, rounded, balanced individuals. It really does take a whole village to raise a child.

Thank you for forming this Committee and I wish you the very best of luck and common sense as you formulate a fairer system for all.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted address]