

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

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Committee Secretary, Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry, Department of the House of Representatives
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To whom it may concern,

I would like to make a brief submission into the above Inquiry. My submission relates to in child support calculations and issues relating to second and stepfamilies. I also touch on the concept of shared parenting as a default ruling. My reasoning will be incomplete, but I speak from frustrated first hand experience on a number of fronts.

1. I have a daughter from a previous relationship. Sadly for my child, her father wanted no part of her or her upbringing. I therefore have quite literally 100% sole custody. I am dismayed that under current child support calculations the child support I receive for her is calculated at the same rate as a parent whose child (or children) might spend up to what I understand to be ninety days and nights of a year with their non-custodial parent. Ninety days represents a significant time period in which responsibilities and expenses can be relieved for the custodial parent. In my situation where my daughter has NO contact with her father I have 100% of all expenses and 100% of all day to day responsibility of my daughter. Yet I am considered to be in the same situation as those families who are able to better share the parenting, resources and of course costs in raising a child (or children). **I believe 100% custodial parents such as myself who experience not a single day's relief from parenting should be calculated at a higher child support rate than those who do in fact share the parenting.**
2. I am now involved in a stepfamily. My partner shares 50% custody of his son, and also pays his son's mother a significant sum each year in child support. This has a huge impact on our family (we are now also expecting a child together). I think it is highly ironic that my partner's contribution to his son's emotional, financial, physical and everyday well being is equally shared and yet he is liable for child support. I might understand this calculation in the event that one parent was on welfare, disabled or similar, but shared parenting cannot help but involve sharing resources and costs to an absolutely equal degree. Parents in this situation should be encouraged to be independent and not dependent on one another. I think shared parenting (50% custody) might become a more attractive proposition if parents were guaranteed to be able to move into their own futures sharing their child and the responsibilities inherent in raising them without the burden of subsidising one another. **I believe 50% custody should not attract child support as the child is already being equally**

cared for from a financial, emotional, physical and everyday well-being perspective.

3. Current legislation does not recognise my daughter as a legitimate part of the stepfamily. This is particularly true in terms of the child support my partner pays and how this is calculated. That is my daughter is not seen as 'counting' toward his current family and costs. Indeed it is as if she does not exist. However current legislation also dictates that his income is considered family income. We are means tested on this income in terms of all potential benefits, including any benefits that might affect my daughter such as child care benefits, family taxation benefits etc. It seems my daughter sometimes counts and sometimes doesn't in terms of being a legitimate part of our family and how this impacts on our taxation status. This is both inequitable and insulting. **Stepchildren need better recognition in terms of their impact on the family.**
4. It is extremely difficult for a second family to thrive under all the existing relevant laws. Stepfamilies and/or second families already face a myriad of complexities simply by their very nature. The existing systems of child support, taxation status, childcare benefit and all other measures relating to the support of families barely even recognise step/second families let alone assist them to survive and thrive. Step/second families struggle very hard to survive from a financial perspective, and I suspect this only adds to reasons that the failure rate of these relationships is unfortunately so very high. **Step/second families need better recognition and as much assistance to thrive as first families.**
5. I grew up in the 1970's as a child of the very first divorce generation, with myself and brother and sister living with my mother and only occasionally seeing my father. At that time full custody was almost granted to the mother by default, with weekend access visits and sometimes school holiday periods granted to the father. From my perspective we were not given ample opportunity to spend time with our father, to get to know him, and to love him. I know that he also felt this as a loss. While I had always known this, it was not until we surrounded his deathbed, with his second family, that it really hit home just how much we had missed out on. While his first family's children struggled for memories, the children from his second family were filled with memories of love and support and fatherhood, from all the day to day experiences that they had had with him over the years. We were cheated of a father and he was cheated of his children. I have seen how 50% custody can work in the case of my stepson. His parents both live in the same suburb, he goes to a central school, family friends are shared, and the decisions his parents make on their futures is dependent on what is best for their child knowing and accepting that their lives will always be linked by him. This is admiral, and achievable. **I believe that where possible 50% custody should be granted by default in order that both children and (mostly) fathers are not cheated of their families and family experiences.**

Thank you for considering my submission. As I stated at the beginning it is a representation of a very personal experience and is very subjective, but these are matters that significantly affect the day to day lives and future plants of myself, my partner and our children.

Yours sincerely,

Bridget Tehan