

Submission No:

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10 Charlotte Close,
TERRIGAL NSW 2260
Secretary
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Hon. K. Ticehurst MP
Federal member for Dobell
Parliament House
CANBERRA

INQUIRY INTO CHILD CUSTODY/RESIDENCE ARRANGEMENTS IN THE
EVENT OF FAMILY SEPARATION.

Dear Mr. Ticehurst,

Thank you for arranging the meeting last night to discuss the matters of the Family Court and the Child Support Agency. I also appreciate your willingness to forward on behalf of us, who were present, our submissions to the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs. As a grandparent of children affected, I have a concern for their welfare and understand the deep hurt which was expressed at last night's meeting and ask that this letter be sent to the appropriate body, with the hope that at last some positive changes will take place.

First, I take the opportunity to congratulate our Prime Minister, John Howard on his stance on the 50-50 presumption, as the starting point for contact with children. He is also to be congratulated in the appointment of Larry Anthony, with responsibility as Minister for Children. Although this may be a junior ministerial position, I hope that the matters raised will receive priority and that necessary funding and resources will be made available to allow him to carry out this important role.

It is my concern that the Family Court and the Child Support Agency only give lip service to "the best interests of the children". From the amount of hurt and disappointment expressed at the public meeting, it is clear that the changes to the Legislation are being frustrated by the delays, costs and prejudices in the present Family Court and the judicial appeals system. The Child Support Agency tries to justify the injustices of its decisions behind the regulations under which it is operating. It is clear that only drastic changes to the Act and to regulations governing the operation of the Agency will be effective.

I also make the plea that some mechanism be established to allow the children the opportunity to express their wishes. It is ludicrous that legislation, which is supposed to have as its mainstay, "the best interests of the children", provides no clear cut and effective way of allowing their voice to be heard. The Committee may consider widening the scope of its charter to allow for a forum of children with Larry Anthony, or at least encourage letters to be written by children. It seems important, to me, that children be given some opportunity in these issues, otherwise they continue to see themselves as items of barter or contention and end up feeling responsible for what are essentially the problems of the adults concerned.

Yours faithfully,

Judy Atkinson.