

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

Submission No: **317**

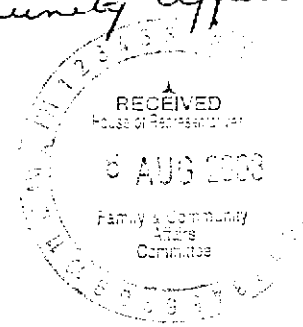
Date Received: **6-8-03**

Secretary:

Dr MURPHY
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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family & Community Affairs
Dist of House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Sir/Madam

Please find enclosed

Submission to the Inquiry into Child Custody Arrangements
in the event of family separation.

I am particularly
passionate about this subject and thus intend to lodge this
submission to try & make a difference in the lives of our
grandchildren so affected by their family separation.

Her father's comment at
the court-house while waiting for their "turn" was "plenty of children
here like this" to their mother. She in answer through her pain
pointed out "but you chose to do this to us all and it didn't
have to be us or our children!"

As a mother I have been so
upset with not being able to change what has happened so am
hoping that through this submission perhaps some change may
be able to start society moving in the right direction to have
some measures in place to prevent so many marriages failing
in the future.

With love in my heart
yours faithfully
Delight S. Murray (Mrs)

**Individual Submission to
Inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation.**

Every separation has its own story -- always difficult, never satisfactory -- as far as custody arrangements for children are concerned.

Our experience with our daughter's marriage break-up involving two children aged 3 years and 1.5 years was something we never wish to experience again. I will reserve these details till the point of examination of witness's opening address for the conciseness of this submission.

I believe that the presumption that children will spend equal time with both parents to be unworkable in the best interests of the child. This could entail two schools if the distance of living addresses of the parents or caregivers is more than 20 kilometres apart. Certainly this is impossible if they reside in another town or State. Individual cases should be considered always.

All children should have contact with all grandparents on a weekly basis if possible -- once a year at least if distance is a problem for weekly access. Family ties are important for the children in any family. They provide a sense of identity and of belonging -- important in establishing and cementing the child's concept of his / her place in an extended family and society and in providing a support structure for the child's social development.

In addition :

- The residing parent needs to have the confidence that the children are well cared for while visiting with the parent in contact. This includes safety in the contact home and vehicle (seatbelts)
- Monthly meetings for effective parenting should be compulsory.
- Compulsory counselling for both parties should be in place in conjunction with the effective parenting meetings.
- Basic assistance from Centrelink is necessary immediately. This assistance should be similar to the basic wage so that the best interests of the children are safeguarded from day 1 of separation.. Adjustments can be made later after assessments are made.
- Basic maintenance (as above) effective immediately and payable until the children are educated and employed. Adjustments with income should then be assessed but basic maintenance should be permanent.
- In the best interests of children, child care placements and payments should be continually assessed. These at present meet most requirements.

- Residing property should be immediately secured until settlement in court and be more easily transferred than at present. Documents eg Title Deeds, Payment of Mortgage, Insurances, ... take too long to be processed.
- Residing parent requires full co-operation with the contact parent with issues involving the child's welfare eg with medical and educational issues.

At present, many forms of assistance are available but in so many different areas of government that they are difficult to find out about much less to access. All assistance needs to be but one phone call away under one umbrella – where all assistance for every step is available through the one office. Children need security immediately not several days or weeks after applications are submitted eg Legal Aid, .. Access to assistance should not be dependent on a person's resourcefulness, education and time availability. Access should be available easily and freely during this time of emotional trauma.

The existing child support formula is tested with each case. Its success or failure will not be known for many years until the children have grown and taken their places as hopefully responsible adults in our society. I feel that assistance under one umbrella as above may improve the outcomes for children in shared care in their futures.

Preventative Measures :

To avoid marriage breakdown, I feel education of children through to adulthood needs to include steps to save families before separation occurs.

I suggest that the following brief outline may begin the process for a better preparation to marriage and the rearing of children in family life.

Year 10 : Me and My Home Environment

Year 11 : Me, My Home, and My Work Environment

Year 12 : Me, My Home, My Work Relationships and the Global Social Environment

In each year level, the emphasis should be on Sharing, Giving, Volunteering, and Working Together in Family Life

Signed :

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