

I write in support of the amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 as proposed in Professor Parkinson's report.

I consider that fathers, after divorce, should have equal parenting rights and that those matters should be settled by dispute resolution where parenting plans should be developed before matters go to court. There should also be improvement to enforcing parenting orders to prevent children being removed interstate or overseas, failure to do so results in expensive litigation and years of frustration for the parent trying to regain custody, not always successfully.

How can a child understand a father's role if contact with him is restricted to occasional weekend or holiday visits? The child will reach adulthood without the necessary understanding which could affect his/her future relationships.

Discrimination against men because of violence perpetrated by a small percentage should cease. The majority of fathers are decent hardworking men who strive to provide for their families according to their means. The portrayal of men as violent is unjust and results in stigmatisation due to the action of the minority. No one wants mothers and children to remain in a dangerous situation and they should be protected but non-violent fathers also need protection against sometimes false accusations.

If equal parenting rights are granted to fathers that could result in lower financial benefits to mothers but, if they are sharing the provision of care, then surely an adjustment could be made. Mothers of underage school children would need some assistance but mothers of schoolage children should be able to work part-time and, if after school care is available, then fulltime. Money earned by the mother should be taken into account when assessing the financial responsibility of each parent. I note that the Prime Minister last year stated that he considered mothers of schoolage children could be in the workforce to reduce the welfare burden. I agree, Australia needs to utilise all productivity available with the present skills shortages. I may state that I worked part-time occasionally before my children attended school and once all four were of schoolage I worked full time and carried out all household tasks without assistance. I did that to ensure that my four children all achieved tertiary education which, on one income, is difficult.

My younger son, aged 50, married 13 years, is presently undergoing divorce proceedings and his wife has offered no reason why she wants a divorce. They have three wellbehaved, intelligent children - two girls 11 and 7 and a boy aged 6. Now my family is concerned that we (their grandparents), aunts, uncles, cousins, may be denied access to them. Access to the extended family should be part of custody arrangements. We are devastated at the prospect of losing contact with them.

My son is perfectly capable of caring for the children. Before he entered university aged 17, I taught him to cook, launder, iron, mend, etc which he continues to do with his family. Many men prior to marriage live in shared accommodation and acquire those skills. It is untrue that only mothers can care for children- what of widowers with no family support who care for their children. With both parents working some fathers already share the tasks. My son often cooks dinner, gets breakfast, cuts lunches, takes the children to school and to their weekend activities. He does not spend time after work in clubs or at weekend sport as he prefers being with his family. One wonders what more he can do. He attends all school meetings and functions.

I am deeply concerned about the custody arrangements for my grandchildren and the effect this is having on my son. A loving father should have equal parenting rights with his children. When assets are divided a father should have sufficient funds to enable him to purchase suitable accommodation to ensure the children can reside with him, particularly, as in most cases, the father has

provided the bulk of the assets - in my son's case, a lovely home in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney for which he has paid every cent.

I appeal to the Committee to legislate the proposed amendments to the Family Law Act which are long overdue and ensure justice is achieved for fathers.

Yours faithfully.

Jean Baker

Lyons ACT