

CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE AUSTRALIA INC

Member Organisation of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations
'NGO in Consultative (Roster) status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations'



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23rd February 2006

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re Senate Inquiry in The Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Bill 2005 Addendum to Submission

I herewith forward, on behalf of our National Social Issues Convenor, Mrs Betty Roberts OAM, an Addendum to our submission to your committee on the above mentioned Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen Clark

National Secretary
CWLA Inc.

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ADDENDUM TO SUBMISSION

**THE SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION
COMMITTEE**

23RD FEBUARY 2006

**Contact Person: Betty Roberts OAM,
National Social Issues Convenor CWLA
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Addendum to the Catholic Women's League of Australia's
submission on
The Family Law Amendment Bill 2005.

Staff Gender Balance at Family Relationship Centres

We have already asked that the counsellor at the Community Relationship Centres be mature, suitably trained and culturally aware of the racial and religious differences of clients and now request an even male/female ratio for a balanced assessment of the presenting problems.

Dealing with accusations of Substance Abuse.

It is almost impossible to identify an alcoholic or other substance user/abuser yet we Australians are the heaviest drinkers in the English speaking world and have a smorgasbord of drugs to choose from.

Male or female, people who use powerful mind altering substances are usually charming intelligent and highly manipulative – and with “denial” as the very symptom of their condition they are most unlikely to admit to “using”.

In such a circumstance a spouse may have well founded fears about handing the children over to a partner they know to be unreliable, irrational and irresponsible after drinking/drugging. The said partner will vigorously deny any accusation and protest loudly that they won't even “use” while they have the kids. Nonetheless a counsellor should not be left in the unenviable position of deciding the matter and thus run the risk of placing the children in danger.

Most people really believe that they can recognise an alcoholic or other drug user but we can't. It is a problem that cuts right across the social fabric and even family members and professionals in the field can be deceived.

Our point is that the Federal Government could be held responsible if the Family Law Amendment Bill 2005 gives counsellors the right to decide such matters, despite a warning from a parent, and the child is subsequently injured in a drink driving accident. We suggest that to ensure the safety of children, the “accused” must be asked to undertake appropriate tests over a period of weeks at an Alcohol and Drug Service.