

24 February 2006

Dads In Distress Inc Response to Senate Inquiry Family Law Amendment Bill 2005

Dads In Distress Inc has been reluctant to be part of the political debate regarding Family Law changes. However, our rapidly growing organization seeks to represent its membership.

Dads In Distress Inc is alarmed to see yet another Inquiry into Family Law changes that seeks inputs from women and law groups yet does not mention men's groups such as DIDS, the Lone Fathers, the Fatherhood Foundation, the Shared Parenting Council and Fathers 4 Equality. The very essence of the Family Law Amendment bill is to stop unfair discrimination. An inquiry that does not seek all relevant and significant groups of affected parties is in itself discriminatory and worthy of inquiry.

Dads in Distress Inc has 32 groups operating in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia. Our web site www.dadsindistress.asn.au is receiving over 3 million hits. Emails describing human tragedy arrive daily. It is a humbling experience to receive the heartfelt messages of anguish and concern. Our 1 300 national call centre in Coffs Harbour received over 25,000 calls in 2005. Many of the calls and emails we receive are from women. They are mothers, sisters, new partners and other relatives looking for some glimmer of assistance in a family law scheme gone mad. In response to the interest by women we have initiated Mums In Distress with groups starting around the country.

The message received through personal interaction, email, telephone letter, and chat room has been consistent and clear. That message is that the current Family Law arrangement is a devastation to families especially children. Our membership has grown more outspoken as they perceive a glimmer of hope that someone in government might be hearing their cries.

As debate starts on the Family Law Amendment, be assured that Dads in Distress and the tens of thousands they represent firmly support a 50 / 50 starting point in all Family Law matters barring proven domestic violence. To do anything else would perpetuate the current system that destroys lives and has a significant financial cost to individuals and taxpayers.

Dads in Distress Inc express its complete and unified support for the submission and points raised by the Shared Parenting Council of Australia regarding the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Bill 2005. The specific statements and definitions of the alterations proposed are available from the Shared Parenting Council Australia submission.

Dads in Distress Inc simply ask; As a starting point in child custody arrangements, acknowledge that every child has a fundamental right to equal parenting time with both the mother and the father, unless there are proven mitigating circumstances, or if the parents agree to an alternate arrangement. Also that deliberate attempts to isolate a child from a parent without just cause should be considered an act of domestic violence.

Dads in Distress Inc remains concerned that groups that have made public submissions opposed to Shared Parenting may be selected to staff the new Relationship Centres.

Dads in Distress Inc has provided submissions to Parliaments previous requests inquiries. We would refer you to those submissions for a more detailed input. Dads in Distress made a verbal submission to the MP Slipper inquiry into Family Law in Canberra on 26 July 2005.

Dads in Distress Inc is very concerned that the considerable and costly effort spent in multiple inquiries into Family Law changes over the past several years will be set aside to appease special interest groups. This would represent a family law disaster in Australia.

Tony Miller
Founder / Director
Dads in Distress Inc