

1 July 2011

The Hon Philip Cummins, Chairman
Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry
GPO Box 4708
Melbourne Vic 3001

Dear Mr Cummins

I realize that I have missed the deadline for making a written submission, and for this I do apologize. I shall be brief in the hope that you and your fellow panellists will have time to read this letter. I have followed the numbering system set out in the Terms of Reference.

1.1.1. The most effective step in preventing child abuse and neglect will be to change the law which gives parents ownership of their children, and make them accountable for the way they treat them. Recently various parents in this State have killed their children in order to punish the other parent.

1.1.2 . As an immediate short-term strategy, child protection workers should listen sympathetically and with an open mind to children and others (especially grandparents) who report abuse. Do not make the reporters feel like transgressors as is often the case at present.

Redefine the term relating to the best interests of the child so that parental rights no longer overrule these interests.

De-stigmatize child abuse by allowing the press to report it.

Remove the secrecy regarding child abuse. This secrecy does not serve the child's interests. An abused child feels that the abuse is their fault and that child needs to know that it is not.

Abusing parents have usually been abused themselves and they enter abusive relationships because of low self-esteem, and the chain of abuse is perpetuated. If abusive behaviour were seen as the symptom of an illness or a mental condition, it would be easier to put a stop to it.

As a medium to long term strategy, introduce into schools at all levels, and possibly via The Australian National Curriculum which is now in preparation, the following topics:

- i. The meaning of the duty of care towards everyone, especially the vulnerable.
- ii. The means to foster and develop empathy as far as this is possible.
- iii. How to take responsibility for one's own life and actions, especially regarding the choice of a partner, and the necessity to avoid having children born into a potentially abusive environment.
- iv. Skills and knowledge to enable a child to recognize abusive behaviour towards them, and how to report it, without fear of repercussions .
- iv. Skills to recognize mental illness in those around them as most child abuse is caused by mental illness.
- v. The right of an individual to mature and have an independent life even if/especially if, parents are trying to prevent this.

8.1.3. Please see my earlier comments on reporting.

Also, change the law so that the Sex Offenders Register is or can be made public. There is no point of having such a Register if no one can consult it. Again, if sexual offences were seen as the result of something wrong in the minds of perpetrators, the condition would be easier to deal with.

Thank you for considering this letter.

Sincerely



Valma P McCallum (Mrs)