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PART C: Submission

1. How would you describe the workplace culture(s) of the Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s) where you work/have worked? Please outline specific strengths and/or weaknesses in terms of workplace culture(s), based on your experiences, as appropriate.

The workplace culture and safety varies depending on the senator or member, the leadership from them and their chief of staff, and the behaviour of other staff.

The weakness is that it can be very random - if you have a workplace that is respectful and abides by the policies and rules set down by the Fair Work Commission, our EBA and the other OHS rules - you are very lucky. But this can change very easily. And there is no where to go for help.

2. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that already do, or could contribute to a safe and respectful environment in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

There are rules that should be followed but are not if a member decides to take another course of action...

3. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that may contribute to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

The imbalance of power and lack of accountability between the senator or member and the staff. Members can complain about a staff member and implement sanctions which impacts on their reputation, salary, career progression, their ongoing job - everything

really. If staff have a complaint about a member, there are mechanisms, however they do not address the power imbalance. There really is nowhere to go if you are a staff member who has issues with the member. And the fact that the Department cannot sanction a member - really. They may be able to warn them but they cannot sack them. I don't think the department has ever shut down an unsafe workplace.

4. Are you familiar with any Commonwealth parliamentary workplace policies, processes and/or practices in relation to staff and worker safety and wellbeing, workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If so, please outline your understanding of how these policies, processes and/or practices operate.

Yes as an [REDACTED] I understand the steps. The steps are OK, and follow the rules and law, but they have no teeth. Staff making a complaint are unlikely to get the member to change their approach, as there are no sanctions on them.

Mostly staff are told of ways to 'talk to your boss' or 'negotiate better with your boss'. The responsibility is with the staff members and members are never counselled to treat staff better in light of a complaint.

5. During your time working in a Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s), have/did you receive any education or training in relation to worker safety and wellbeing, and/or how to prevent or respond to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please outline your experience of the training and whether it was useful in increasing your knowledge and/or skills in relation to preventing and responding to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault.

Yes lots

6. Are you aware of how you and/or other people working in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces can report workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault (either formally or informally)? If yes, please specify what reporting options exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those reporting options if applicable.

Yes

I have been very lucky as to member been bullied or harassed but if I was I am not sure I would trust the system to support me. As an experienced [REDACTED] and mature woman, I have not had any success in advocacy for younger staff members who have been treated badly by a member. Inevitably they left as there was no satisfactory resolution.

Particularly as Electorate Officers in small teams, often isolated from a bigger group, if one person is having problems with the boss it spoils the atmosphere and people (mostly the victim) leave. And the cycle goes on.

7. Are you aware of any supports available in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces to people who experience workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please specify what supports exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those supports if applicable.

yes. Mediation has been offered. But at the end of the day agreements reached are not always implemented. Who makes sure they are?

8. Based on your experiences, do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how to improve the prevention of and responses to workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

There is an independent person/body who investigates complaints about members, that

has the capacity and authority to actually take action with members, to ensure staff are protected.

That members do compulsory training, in person, regularly on all aspects of employment. THEY ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE AND CANNOT DO WHAT THEY LIKE TO STAFF.

That a record is kept of members on their history with employment and other complaints and there are sanctions, reporting to their party leaders and beyond if no changes made.

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell the Commission?

The power imbalance between members and staff in the employment has to be addressed.

It has to go beyond the party loyalty and promises to staff if they do not report or complain.

There needs to be sanctions for members who have a history of bad behaviour.

The Department needs to be on the side of employees and not have their hands tied.

The contracts ad signed by the members but administered by the department. Two bosses, two rules and cultures and the staff member in in the middle.

Unions do their best to assist but they are outsiders and have no power over members of parliament or the Department...

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