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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.

Noting that I have worked almost exclusively in [REDACTED] so my perspective is that of intense working relationships with MPs and being in situations where harassment can easily occur, unlike some roles where staff are not alone with MPs.

[REDACTED] has a strong culture of service and professionalism. While under current leadership there is a negative culture of bullying, under previous leadership there was a strong culture of protecting staff. HR policies are strong and can deal with harassment at a peer to peer level but are unable to deal with harassment and bullying by MPs. The culture of service currently translates to giving MPs what they want, rather than what they need. MPs used to accept no for an answer if their requests were outrageous but this culture has been lost and MPs are waited on and all requests met. This has negative consequences for all building occupants. As [REDACTED] staff, we now need to hope MPs are reasonable in their requests rather than refusing unreasonable demands and being assured of backup from [REDACTED].

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?

Prior to the events of [REDACTED], if an MP was harassing staff, [REDACTED] would speak to [REDACTED] who would reprimand MPs and consequences would be removal from international delegations, parliamentary committees etc.

After the hyper-politicisation of the political events of [REDACTED], the new cohort of MPs expected us to be as political as them. [REDACTED] were inexperienced and that 'old guard' that were respected across party lines and could keep with colleagues in line we're no longer in Parliament. Prior to then, there were any number of MPs I knew I could privately speak to about their colleagues' behaviour and they would pull them into line. Now I risk a complaint being put in about me.

[REDACTED] need to have a safe process within the party system to encourage reports of poor behaviour. To alert them to the new MPs who are just being a 'bit off' with staff - these are the ones who become harassers. We see them from Day 1 - their colleagues do not, but should be made aware because they will only listen to other MPs.

Those MPs who treat us as professionals - the experts in our democracy that we are - are the ones who should be emulated, they make working in the Parliament a joy.

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

We have a whole system of warning new staff (female mostly) of how to act around certain MPs - how not to be alone with them, how to make sure they don't know your room number when travelling, how to leave a meeting room if you end up alone with them.

There is no formal process to complain about this behaviour. The [REDACTED] have no power to reprimand MPs for their behaviour and those who behave badly know it so they get away with feeling up bra straps, lewd comments, yelling - basically treating us like the 'downstairs staff'.

The [REDACTED] currently has serious internal bullying issues. This is the result of certain personalities within the leadership but also the attitude of 'serve the parliament at all costs'.

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.

Within the [REDACTED] there are standard public sector policies re the above. Their implementation depends on [REDACTED], they are sometimes implemented well, sometimes badly.

There are no policies in place that assist in complaints about MPs.

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.

Endless public sector training. Mandatory every 3 years and ad-hoc sessions in between. I felt as a manager I could assist my staff and as a peer how to behave myself and support staff.

But these were also seen as a bit of a joke because of what we have to do to protect ourselves from MPs and their staff, who are not subject to this training.

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.

As above, for peers yes, for MPs and staff there are no processes.

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 the EAP and peer support, but again, this does not apply to MPs.

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 needs to be a separate body that deals with these issues for their entire workplace (i.e. take it entirely out of the hands of departments - [REDACTED]). [REDACTED] need to have the trust and confidence of all MPs so I can understand how it is difficult to confront them about their behaviour and then be a trusted advisor, this simply doesn't work. I have also witnessed the most abusive of MPs consider [REDACTED] beneath them so they don't care about a admonishment about treatment of staff from them.

A separate body that establishes the behavioural standards across the building and is also an avenue for all complaints would greatly assist the culture.

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

The behaviour of MPs and lack of action is now so appalling that I am about to leave my career of [REDACTED] - and I am one of the people who would stand up for myself and my staff and demand better behaviour. But I am tired of having my professionalism and expertise dismissed but people who are just there to play politics. I do not know how this will change but I very much hope that at least the culture of sexual harassment can be improved by the Commission's work.

Thank you for your work.

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