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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.**

My time was split between a local electorate office and APH. I travelled to APH as part of a smaller team.

I found that within the EO, and within our own suite at APH, the culture was strong and the work environment best practice. As a team we were friendly and supportive of one another. Our boss was sensitive to, and understanding of the importance of time off to manage health and to achieve work/life balance.

However, I noticed that between offices and around APH, this was not necessarily the case. I would frequently experience or overhear sexist remarks at APH, or find myself being closely watched by much older men around the corridors of the building. In speaking with other female staff members, this was not an unusual experience.

I once heard a high profile man comment into his phone that 'these bloody women won't shut up.'

The experiences were not always intended to be unkind. In one instance I held a door for an older man whose hands were full with coffees. Upon thanking me he remarked that it was a role reversal - him carrying coffees and me holding the door.

The comment was delivered kindly, and I felt no threat from the man. However, I include this anecdote as an example of the overwhelming 'vibe' of the building or the predisposition of a number of its regular inhabitants.

These behaviours are not limited to just others who work in the building.

I would often encounter sexist remarks from people who had come to meet with my boss, who either assumed that I was a 'secretary' or otherwise had no knowledge relevant to their issue or the performance of my job. I felt these assumptions were always made on the basis of my gender.

Another incident occurred when I answered the phone to a colleague from another Members office, who had a question regarding legislation that was being debated at the time. As I begun to answer, he interrupted me to say that he was very busy and would rather just speak to someone who knew the answer. To this day, I remain frustrated that I acquiesced and said I'd check for him, when I knew that I was correct.

**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?**

The experience in your direct office, with the team that you work with day to day, impacts most directly on your overall experience of Cth parliamentary workplaces. I had an excellent experience within my team, and I was fortunate to regularly work with other women that I could compare experiences with, and likewise with men who were understanding and aware of the differences in experiences between the two genders.

However, I am aware that I was lucky, and that this is likely an unusual experience. I base this assumption on the behaviour detailed in the answer above.

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

Parliament House is an intense environment, and the trends that we see in the broader community are merely amplified there. It is not just in Parliament House where sexual harassment and sexual assault are experienced. It's just that in Parliament House it is for whatever reason more newsworthy or shocking.

Outside of my work at APH, I have had a number of negative experiences. They include being followed home on public transport and being touched inappropriately underneath my clothes when out with friends. It wasn't until recently that I even began to consider these experiences as unusual - such is the prevalence of this kind of behaviour in our communities.

The only thing 'different' or 'special' about parliamentary workplaces is that there's a heightened element - driven by long hours and large amounts of time spent away from home. Parliament House doesn't make men objectify, assault or harass women. These men would have done this wherever they were.

**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.**

Vaguely. I never had need of these services.

**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.**

I did not.

**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.**

If it were relevant, I would have reported it directly to my boss.

**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.**

n/a

**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?**

As I stated in my response to question 3 - the key to preventing this behaviour in parliamentary is the same as preventing it anywhere.

More work must be done on gender equality and women need to be supported to attain and remain in senior positions.

Men have a responsibility to call out rather than observe or laugh along with low level sexist behaviour, to ensure a permissive environment towards more serious transgressions doesn't develop.

Specifically to Parliament House and in regards to general safety, I would suggest better lighting around the Reps and Senators entrance. In winter, it would be dark when I both arrived and left the house. Travelling alone, it would often mean traversing these areas when nobody else was nearby. This is not ideal.

I would also suggest revisiting the entitlements rules regarding the use of cabcharge for travel to and from APH. This is generally not permitted unless you are carrying luggage or bulky items for work. This fails to recognise the specific geography of APH (surrounded by bush, away from residential houses, with staff generally leaving and arriving alone - often in the dark and with no lighting).

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

No, thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions or wish to clarify any of the matters raised.

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