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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 culture is one of work hard, play hard. Staff are paid an overtime allowance that is seen by the system as unlimited overtime. There is little tolerance in most offices for any personal commitments or non-parliamentary activities that distract from work. There is little tolerance for mistakes, particularly those that lead to media coverage. Staff are expendable, as they come and go with regularity while elected MPs and Senators are seen as much higher in value and therefore status.

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 needs to be an independent MOPS support agency, as staff do not trust the Department of Finance to deal with workplace issues, as everyone knows it reports to the Finance Minister, and there is a perception that the Minister is a partisan political figure who will put the party ahead of the welfare of individual staff. Many MPs, Senators and Ministers come to parliament without experience in managing staff, and there should be mandatory training about the rights and responsibilities of management. Staff should also undergo mandatory training about their rights and responsibilities.

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

There needs to be clearer rules and restrictions around things such as overtime, so that staff do not feel isolated from family and their lives outside politics. Parliament needs to reduce the hours in sitting weeks, by adopting technology so that votes during divisions can be counted in seconds rather than the 10 minutes or so it currently takes. The hours of work expected during sitting weeks contributes to the culture of late night drinking and the stress that comes from tiredness. MPs, Senators and Ministers have complete discretion about salary progression, which places staff in a vulnerable position in wage negotiations. Junior staff are paid relatively generously, compared to salaries available in the private sector, while senior staff are offered relatively less generous salaries. The combination of lower salaries and long hours means that Ministers tend to recruit a higher percentage of younger people into senior roles for which they are unqualified or lack relevant experience. That creates a culture of inflated egos and self importance that can also afflict older staff although usually to a lesser degree.

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.

The policies are reasonably clear and most staff would be aware of them, although I do not believe many MPs, Senators and Ministers would be fully informed. The problem is that staff feel their employment and salaries are subject to the personal whims of the elected official, and do not trust the rules and policies to protect them. There is also the culture of not complaining, as that risks negative media coverage. Many staff subject to bullying or harassment simply leave and usually maintain silence so as not to attract the vindictiveness of the party system.

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 held supervisory roles at a relatively senior level and was never offered nor undertook any training whatsoever. However, I did undertake self education by ensuring I understood the relevant conditions as they applied to staff.

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.

Most staff would be aware of help lines and potential support from the Finance Department, however there is reluctance to take that up.

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.

As above.

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?

Reduce hours of work in sitting weeks

Place limits on overtime work

Reduce discretion of elected MPs and Senators over salaries

Encourage recruitment of older and more experienced staff, particularly into senior roles

Mandatory training of elected officials and staff

Establish stronger penalties for taxpayer-funded staff engaging in party political activities during work hours, including for MPs and Senators

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