

**Name Withheld Submission**  
**Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces**

I am employed at [REDACTED] I write this submission to contribute my personal experiences and those of other colleagues that I have either witnessed myself, or been informed of.

It should be noted that the workplace referred to collectively as 'Parliament House' is actually a collection of Parliamentary agencies (employed under the Parliamentary Service Act) as well as Parliamentarians and their 'staffers' (employed under the MOPS Act). The experiences of each group can vary widely and they may have totally different workplace conditions. I am writing from the perspective of the [REDACTED], and cannot speak to the experiences of people employed elsewhere in Parliament. Where I refer to [REDACTED] I am referring to [REDACTED]

**Overview**

In my view, there is a culture of coverup, minimisation and excuses when it comes to bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in [REDACTED] This culture is not being appropriately addressed at the [REDACTED] It is difficult to estimate the number of dedicated Parliamentary staff who have been damaged by their experiences in [REDACTED] I have witnessed multiple colleagues who had planned to build their careers in [REDACTED] choosing to resign and never return based on their experiences here. In addition to emotional and psychological harm, I am aware of multiple people who have developed chronic physical health issues related to the stress they experienced while working at [REDACTED]

Broadly speaking, these issues relate to:

- Staff experiences being contingent on individual managers
- A lack of recognition of power imbalances between managers and staff within the [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- Inadequacy of internal HR complaints processes
- Professional development being heavily contingent on avoiding bullying concerns
- Personal experiences with bullying in the [REDACTED]
- Consistently high workloads, and the general culture of mistreatment of junior staff
- The long-term impacts of bullying and harassment and coping mechanisms
- A lack of 'psychological safety' in [REDACTED]
- The culture of coverup and damage control [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] deliberately sidelining staff welfare, and minimising any harm and trauma experienced
- [REDACTED]
- Recommendations

## Specific issues

The treatment of junior [redacted] staff by [redacted] is dependent on whether that staff member's manager [redacted] is supportive. If they are not, the junior staff are effectively unprotected. Staff experiences can come down to luck - a combination of [redacted] [redacted] who may or may not be abusive or inappropriate, and a [redacted] who may or may not choose to intervene [redacted] I have experienced and am aware of several incidents in which [redacted] employees - particularly in the [redacted] - have been subjected to inappropriate or bullying behaviour by [redacted] and the general message from the [redacted] is to 'suck it up'. The onus is almost always placed on the employee to either do something to prevent the inappropriate behaviour, or to somehow 'handle' the behaviour better. Junior staff consistently receive the message, unspoken or otherwise, that by complaining they risk being seen as intolerant, unprofessional, oversensitive, or unable to meet the challenge of a 'normal' workload or working environment [redacted]

There is an inability or unwillingness [redacted] to recognise the power dynamics inherently present [redacted]

[redacted] There is also a widespread practice - which is part of a much wider trend - of employing [redacted] staff on short-term contracts, [redacted] [redacted] The offer of a permanent or ongoing position in [redacted] is elusive, with many junior staff on rolling short-term contracts. This compounds any fears that reporting bullying, harassment or sexual harassment will damage their professional development. [redacted]

[redacted] I am also aware of staff who are employed on short contracts, which are repeatedly extended for short durations, [redacted]

The power imbalance naturally present in all teams is further exacerbated by the level of discretionary control [redacted] over allowances such as paid overtime, holiday leave, study leave, flexible working conditions (e.g. part-time), and professional development opportunities. [redacted]

[redacted] This discretionary power can easily be used as an indirect form of control through withholding staff entitlements such as study leave, an allowance designed to enable staff to develop their professional capacity while working [redacted]

[redacted] In my case, maintaining access to my discretionary entitlements was the sole reason that I did not raise concerns about bullying and harassment [redacted]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I have witnessed multiple occasions in which the professional development of staff who have ‘rocked the boat’ (by following appropriate protocol by reporting concerns or making formal complaints about bullying, harassment or sexual harassment) has been visibly impacted. On at least one occasion, I was warned by a [REDACTED] that in previous years, a staff member had left [REDACTED] because they ‘spoke out of turn,’ which I understood to mean intervening when a junior colleague was being bullied. This was presented to me as if it were career advice, but I took it to be a veiled threat from my boss that my future career [REDACTED] would be contingent on never intervening to prevent bullying, or any form of harassment. I was literally told to ‘be careful’ when asserting myself, which I took to mean ‘Don’t intervene, don’t report anything, and do not stand up for yourself.’

My own experience has varied greatly [REDACTED] In one team, being snapped at [REDACTED] during conversations was a matter of routine, and in times of high stress (which are common in [REDACTED] this could escalate to shouting. This behaviour fit into a broader team context, where all staff worked fearfully, waiting to be the next target of abuse. This [REDACTED] routinely responded aggressively to staff who undertook even minor tasks without their permission, but also when staff did not proactively do something they had not yet been instructed to do. This unstable and toxic environment left myself and the rest of the team feeling completely disempowered and highly distressed. I have also worked in teams [REDACTED] which were clearly deeply scarred and recovering from the impact of [REDACTED] inadequate management. A key contributing factor to this is an inability or unwillingness [REDACTED] to address bullying and harassment. Any action is essentially left to the perpetrator (to stay or leave), and to the victim/s (leave or get over it). To my knowledge it has overwhelmingly been the victim and not the perpetrator who must move teams (or leave [REDACTED] entirely) to escape the bullying or harassment.

The consistently high workload [REDACTED] makes the risk of bullying and harassment more tangible - ‘You’re too busy’ is a mantra which can be used to refuse almost any request made by a junior member of staff, regardless of their capabilities. When concerns have been raised [REDACTED]

██████████ over issues like unreasonably high workload expectations or the refusal of discretionary allowances ██████████

██████████ There is a real fear of professional repercussions if a junior staff member is seen to ‘rock the boat’.

In my view, there is a general culture of mistreatment and lack of support for junior staff ██████████  
██████████ I am aware of managers asking sick junior staff to delay taking sick leave, ██████████  
██████████ . I experienced this when, while seriously and visibly unwell, I did not feel able to ask for sick leave as my team was extremely busy, and I did not think that I had secured enough goodwill ██████████ to ask the ‘favour’.

██████████ When getting even sicker, I felt I had no choice but to tell ██████████  
I was leaving, rather than asking. At the time, I felt like I was underperforming by going home sick. ██████████

I have experienced the detrimental long-term impacts of bullying and harassment ██████████ When moving roles, I experienced intense anxiety to the point of tears over my performance and I was incredibly distressed when making minor mistakes. I found myself unable to process normal feedback due to the unhealthy coping mechanisms developed over a long period to deal with a toxic work environment. My self confidence, productivity and anxiety levels were all impacted ██████████  
██████████ I did not feel able to share these concerns ██████████ as I believed it would impact my professional reputation.

In response to ██████████ culture ██████████, staff have been known to draw on an informal network for advice and warnings from colleagues about how to deal with ██████████ This includes staff warning each other to keep an eye on ██████████ who are working with or under people known to bully, harass or sexually harass. ██████████

██████████ In my view, this network has developed because junior staff may receive no support from within their own team, ██████████  
██████████ The level of secrecy maintained in the name of ‘privacy’ overwhelmingly serves to protect the perpetrators of bullying and harassment, as well as ██████████ but not the victim.

### **The effects of this**

I and many of my colleagues do not consider ██████████ to be a ‘psychologically safe’ workplace. By this, I mean that in the event that I or my colleagues were to experience some form of bullying, harassment or assault, I fully expect that minimal support would be provided to the victim ██████████ and their primary goal would be to minimise the incident/s and to protect the reputation of ██████████ and the

perpetrator. Any pronouncements by [REDACTED] relating to supporting staff, protecting their mental and physical health, or taking a no-tolerance approach to poor treatment by [REDACTED], simply ring hollow when viewed alongside the lived experiences of [REDACTED]. Trust [REDACTED] is incredibly low throughout [REDACTED], particularly for anyone who has reported concerns or incidents [REDACTED]. While some individuals [REDACTED] may genuinely want to support junior staff in such instances, they are usually outnumbered by those who prefer to enable the perpetrator than to take substantive action.

[REDACTED] there appears to be a culture of coverup and damage control when it comes to bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. The [REDACTED] have not demonstrated the ability or inclination to address these issues, despite their persistence. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The [REDACTED] acts as if they have no control over the actions [REDACTED]. This issue is both systemic and structural, but also one of inadequate leadership and a toxic workplace culture of permissiveness.

[REDACTED] This means that any excessive workloads, bullying, harassment or sexual harassment are merely a distraction as long as work is being produced by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Internal training routinely focuses on developing 'resilience', rather than intervening to prevent inappropriate situations. Access to the free EAP counselling [REDACTED] does not address the root causes of issues which lead staff to seek these services. High workload, burnout, sexual harassment and bullying are often met with completely inadequate responses which can exacerbate these things unless the victim chooses to leave their team, or leave [REDACTED]

I am keenly aware of the cumulative impact that a toxic and bullying workplace culture can have on an individual's mental wellbeing. Having observed bullying and harassment in multiple contexts, I recognise the cognitive dissonance that occurs when junior staff experience abusive treatment that is not acknowledged by anyone else. Coping mechanisms further embed the idea that this treatment is 'normal' and 'everyday'. The response [REDACTED] often serves to further entrench this idea, with inadequate responses that seek to minimise the severity of the behaviour. This can re-traumatise the victims, or even create a new and separate trauma by rendering them powerless in a different context.

I feel that messages, responses and casual comments [REDACTED] have indicated ignorance about the seriousness and commonality of allegations of bullying, harassment & sexual harassment, the emotional and psychological impact upon victims, and the power dynamics inherent in such abuses. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Recommendations**

- 1) [REDACTED] must be able to access an anonymous complaints mechanism independent of parliament, departments and ministers.
  
- 2) Human resources processes in [REDACTED] should be modified to recognise the power imbalance inherent in staff/supervisor relationships. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
  
- 3) Staff should be given access to externally provided training on how to recognise bullying behaviour, how not to engage in it themselves, and the processes that [REDACTED] will follow where a complaint of bullying takes place.
  
- 4) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] binding code of conduct for parliamentarians and staffers, and communicate the requirements for how [REDACTED] are to be treated.
  
- 5) [REDACTED] should undertake training regarding [REDACTED] obligations to protect staff, how to conduct victim-centred complaints management, and develop new sets of internal policies which clearly state where behaviour will require intervention, and what that process of intervention will be.