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.

I have worked in a parliamentary office for over ████████, both for ██████████████████████████ and currently for a ██████████████████████████ (both male). If I didn't love the role, I certainly wouldn't have stayed for as long as I have.

The culture of various offices varies greatly and can also be influenced by whether or not you're in government or not. Being in ██████████ (and working for a ████████████) means that there is significantly less pressure on the MP, compared to being in ██████████ - and particularly being ██████████████████████.

I have been extremely fortunate in that I have had two great employers and great colleagues/mentors that have become life-long friends. Both employers have been highly respectful to all staff and I have no complaints against either.

I know that this has been said multiple times throughout this debate about the culture in the building, but it really is a unique environment that isn't replicated elsewhere. ████████████████ are under extreme levels of pressure. They are constantly judged by the media and the public and work extremely long hours, meaning that staff also work long hours and spend more time with their employer than their own families. The nature of the role means that there is no real alternative to this, as it is not a 9-5 job. The public are already highly critical of politicians and to bring the role more into line with normal working standards would be met with fierce criticism. Whilst in my experience, the long hours and time spent with your MP hasn't created any major problems (other than burn out and tiredness!), you can easily see how issues develop. There is an element of human nature when you get males and females working closely together, no matter what the environment.

In addition, because ████████████ does need to spend so much time with their staff and rely on them so heavily, they need to be able to trust them, as the implications for them could ultimately mean they lose their parliamentary position or their seat. It is a high stakes environment.

At the same time, ██████████████████████████ are also restricted in who they can hire and what pay they put their staff on due to the ██████████████████████. In my own experience, my employer has written on multiple occasions to have my pay increased, only to have this rejected. I've never met with ██████████████████████ or been interviewed by them, yet ██████████████████ sees fit to dictate who ████████████ hire and what pay they are allocated.

When ██, I recall the ████████████████ were unwilling to appoint our ████████ ██████████████████████████. I don't know what their justification was at the time, but I recall my employer fighting the decision and eventually succeeding. She has been in the role ever since. However, in other offices, ████████████████ were installed against the will of ████████████████ and it usually ended up being a highly dysfunctional office with a high staff turnover (and those ████████████ have since left politics).

In my experience with the ██████████████, my employer has repeatedly asked for me to be paid at the highest band of my position. Firstly this was at the ██████████████████████ and now ████████████████. On every occasion they have refused and placed me at a lower level. An explanation is never provided and there is no opportunity to "state your case". My view is that if your employer wishes to pay you at a certain level (and they believe you are deserving of that) or appoint certain people, then it shouldn't be up to an ██████████████████████ to overrule that. I know from other offices that the ████████████████████████████ have created very unhappy offices and as such, I think it should be abolished immediately as it does nothing to make staff feel valued or reflect the wishes of the ██████████████████.

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?

In both offices that I have worked in, I have been lucky enough to have fantastic female supervisors ██████████████████

███ ████████ █████. As a young female staffer when I first started, these women became great mentors and you could go to them with any issues or concerns you had. Furthermore, the two MPs I have worked for have been very approachable and I have had no concerns in raising any matters with them. As such, I think having supportive colleagues can greatly assist in creating a safe and respectful work environment.

I know this cannot be said for all offices. I think it really depends on the individual you work for. They all have different personalities, different goals/objectives and different leadership qualities. I have anecdotally heard of stories where ███████████████ have thrown staplers at staff, as well as rumours about █████████ regularly cheating on their spouses.

My ██████ used to also work for a ██████████ and his experiences are very different to mine. Despite both being males, his boss would behave terribly - including not talking to staff for months on end for no apparent reason (which the staff called ████████████ He ended up leaving due to the poor behaviour of his boss.

I think it is important for staff to have someone else they can go to to discuss issues with their employer. Particularly for electorate offices, as they are small offices with not many staff to support each other. However, at the end of the day, it is essentially up to the MP as to who they keep in their office. If they can't trust someone or don't get along with them, then there is no point in them keeping that staff member on, as it is unfair to all involved.

3. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that may contribute to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?
Whilst I haven't had any direct experiences with bullying or sexual harassment whilst working in Parliament House, I have observed what I think are factors that can contribute to the behaviour. Prior to entering politics, I worked in administration at an ██████████████████████. I was one of two women in an office of about 30 men. I was regularly taunted, called various inappropriate names and made to feel very uncomfortable. I made sure I was well out of the way when it came to "Friday arvo drinks" as I felt quite nervous around these men. I only mention this to emphasise that I don't think this behaviour is unique to Parliament House and will take systemic change across all of Australian society over many, many years.

Aside from the individual personalities of MPs, I actually have heard anecdotally of more issues with ████████████ ████████████████ than Minister's. I think this is because they have less pressure and time demands than Minister's when in Canberra. They are able to attend more of the evening functions and socialise with others once the House rises, whereas most Minister's are working until very late.

Furthermore, I think that some MPs become very self-important and "full of themselves" once they become MPs. Suddenly they have people tripping over themselves to meet with them, have invitations piling in for all sorts of events and have access to perks (such as business class flights, Comcars, access to Chairman's Lounge etc). I think this can give some of them an over-inflated sense of importance and they start to think they can take liberties that they would otherwise not. Again, this all comes down to the individual personalities and is not unique to politics.

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.
Prior to these latest issues, I was only really aware of the M&PS staff help desk (which was largely for admin type issues) as well as the Employee Assistance Program. I've never used the Employee Assistance Program, but to be honest, I don't think I ever would. I don't think that people outside of Parliament House really know what it's like to work in the building and the significant pressures you face. Even with the new hotline for staff, I don't think I'd use it. In the first instance, I'd probably speak to our Chief of Staff and, if the issue wasn't related to my boss, then my employer directly.

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.

In ████ working in a parliamentary workplace (including many years as ████████████), I haven't really had any education or training for worker safety and wellbeing (other than fire drills and OH&S matters like trip hazards/police matters within the office).

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 outlined above, I am aware of the Employee Assistance Program and the new reporting hotline. I've never had to use them, but I'm not sure I would. I don't feel they would really understand the environment in which we work and I'm not sure what they'd really be able to do about it, as there is no formal reporting mechanism or recourse.

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?
Here are some of my thoughts on possible suggestions:

- For ██████████ - remove the █████████████████████████ as the first order of business
- Implement mandatory training for all MPs on sexual harassment/appropriate workplace behaviour annually. They will complain that it takes too much time or is a waste of time, but I think a constant reminder is useful.
- Perhaps introduce a support service within Parliament House that is made up of other staffers or key mentors from within each political party. Some dedicated people that staff could make an appointment with to chat to and who are also staff within the system (so they get it).
- Introduce a proper HR department or expand the role of M&PS. They would do everyone's contracts and a lot of the office HR/admin which currently falls to individual offices. Also introduce a proper training/induction day for new employees.
- Introduce some form of punishment system for misbehaving MPs - for instance three strikes and they are publicly reported as having issues with staff complaints of bullying etc. Or if there are complaints against a MP, a proper investigation is undertaken independently of government (to also ensure that the MP is fairly treated in the event of a staff member having unsubstantiated claims or a vendetta against the MP).
- Perhaps look at reviewing the entitlements that MPs receive to bring them more in-line with most other jobs and to keep them in touch with the real world (e.g. a cap on Comcar trips per year/use a taxi; caps on business class flights for short journey's; pay for their Chairman's Lounge access etc).