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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 workplace culture varied significantly between ministerial offices, and - in my experience - was mostly dependent upon the culture set by the Chief of Staff and senior members of staff. COSs also tended to employ staff with similar behavioural attributes, which either exacerbated any pre-existing issues or reinforced good behaviours and cultures.

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?

Cessation of overlooking certain behaviours if the staff member in question had been in the office a long time, or enjoyed close personal friendships/relationships with other senior staff or MPs. Confidential reporting mechanisms and mandatory reviewing/warning staff once a person has received three or more complaints from the same individual or complaints from two or more different individuals.

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

Senior staff who have been in an office for a long time and forged a close relationship with the MP/CoS/other senior staff in APH. The power dynamic shifts significantly in those staff members' favour which some actively take advantage of. The lack of formal mentorship or 'buddy systems' within APH also leaves junior staff in vulnerable situations, particularly where they enter a well-established or difficult office dynamic.

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.

I am aware of counselling services which are available to staff, although I am not aware of anyone having used it before. I am also aware of the ability to make complaints to the Special Minister for State's office, which may undertake a review or investigation. I am only aware of one investigation that had happened following a bullying complaint, but I understand the investigation was not conclusive due to a lack of evidence (my understanding is that other staff members who were witnesses to the incident were reluctant to provide statements).

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.

No.

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 in my response to Question 4.

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?

The MOPs Act should be overhauled and operate in a manner more in line with other parts of the public service - whereby you are employed by a central agency, but your line of reporting and supervision may be within specific offices. Performance management, complaints (both bullying and sexual harassment/assault) should be centrally managed by the agency rather than directly by the Minister/MP/CoS. Formal mechanisms for pastoral care, and professional and personal support, need to be introduced for MOPs staff. Complaints and breaches of behavioural standards should be taken seriously and consistently across all offices by a central agency that sits outside the office, with repercussions upheld regardless of staff seniority. MPs should be made aware of complaints against their staff, and enforce probationary measures where the complaints meet a certain threshold (of volume or seriousness). MPs should be held responsible for staff well-being as the ultimate supervisor within each office.

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

MPs and Chiefs of Staff should undertake mandatory training for HR management. Additionally, for larger offices (e.g. Cabinet Ministers' offices), a senior member of staff should be appointed as a specific HR manager to assist with initial counselling, mediation or complaints referrals. Ensuring that at least one senior staff member (Senior Adviser or above) in each office is female may also assist in providing junior staff with more options for reporting. Most importantly, formal mentoring and 'buddy' programs must be implemented to allow new and junior staff to seek personal and professional assistance in Commonwealth Parliamentary offices.

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