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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.

Firstly, I think it's important to examine the experiences of and protections for public servants who deal with Ministers, their staff and MPs. [REDACTED] I was employed in the APS and worked closely with the Minister's Office. I was invited to a corridor party and encouraged to be nice to a [REDACTED] MP. This man sexually assaulted me, and pursued me when I escaped to the point I had to be escorted by security guards. Following this assault, I was informed the Minister had 'jokingly' enquired if my staff excellence award was for 'giving blow jobs in Parliament House corridors'. Senior departmental staff took no action and the man faced no consequences. I was traumatised - by the experience itself, by the 'slut shaming' defamatory ridicule and by the failure to take any action or care for my well-being. While this occurred many years ago, the pain persists and the culture seems unchanged. Throughout my public service career, my staff and I repeatedly faced abuse and bullying from Ministerial staff that went largely unaddressed and was, in some cases, encouraged by Ministers. This behaviour was non sexual and was conducted by both female and male staffers from both sides of politics.

At the Federal level I also worked for two male Ministers who both behaved professionally and with propriety at all times.

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?

Sadly I can't name specific protective factors. Each office is a separate workplace, so the culture is driven by the Minister. Politics is a profession that fosters bullying, a 'win at all costs' mentality and survival of the fittest.

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

See above. Each office is a separate workplace with the culture and behaviour driven by the Minister and CoS. The party politics, long hours, separation from home, male dominance and alcohol all make it worse, coupled with contempt for the public service.

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.

Is this the joke section? They don't operate.

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.

The culture doesn't really allow for reporting.

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.

The culture doesn't support access.

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 trouble lies at the heart of a combative political system, where it's tribal and win at all costs. Bullying is rife, particularly from staffers to the public service. Sexual harassment is obviously more common than sexual assault, but both also reflect the worst of parliamentary culture and broader societal norms.

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

I think junior ministerial staff and public servants need to be empowered and better protected and bullying and harassment identified and dealt with. Political leaders should set positive examples.

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