



HOUSE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO CHILD CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS

MEDIA RELEASE

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*Chair: Mrs Kay Hull, MP
Deputy: Mrs Julia Irwin, MP*

Child custody inquiry to begin public hearings

The House of Representatives Family and Community Affairs Committee's inquiry into child custody arrangements will begin its program of public hearings in two weeks (on Thursday 28 August).

Public hearings will be held in every State and Territory. The first hearings will be in Geelong, Victoria, and the suburb of Knox, in Melbourne.

The initial program is:

- Thursday 28 August – Geelong, Victoria, & Knox (Melbourne)
- Friday 29 August – Launceston, Tasmania
- Monday 1 September – Wollongong, NSW, and Blacktown (western Sydney)

The Committee will then hold hearings in Queensland. Further detail on all these hearings will be issued later.

More than 1500 submissions have been received by the inquiry so far. This is a record for an inquiry by this Committee, and amongst the highest ever for a House of Representatives Committee.

The Committee is extremely pleased with this response to its call for submissions, according to Committee Chair Mrs Kay Hull.

"Whilst submissions are still coming in, the committee is unable to guarantee that submissions received after 18 August will be considered for the public hearings," Mrs Hull said.

Submissions will be made public, unless confidentiality and privacy matters dictate otherwise. Submissions will begin to be published on the inquiry website as soon as practicable. Submissions can be kept confidential:

- Where the author has asked that all or part of their submission be kept confidential;
- Where there are people other than the author named or identified in the submission and it is not clear that they have agreed to that information being made public; or
- Where the author's name, address and/or the circumstances outlined in the submission could lead to the identification of other people.

"Where the committee concludes that it should protect the privacy and confidentiality of anyone involved, the committee may decide not to publish all or part of the submission and treat it as confidential, or to publish the submission but to withhold the author's name and address," Mrs Hull said.

The committee will consider all issues raised in all submissions, whether published or not.

The inquiry – the terms of reference of which appear below - was referred to the Committee by the Federal Attorney-General and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. It was announced by the Prime Minister in the House of Representatives in the last week of June 2003.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee is to investigate and make recommendations for action on the following matters:

- (a) given that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration:
 - (i) what other factors should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with their children post separation, in particular whether there should be a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent and, if so, in what circumstances such a presumption could be rebutted; and
 - (ii) in what circumstances a court should order that children of separated parents have contact with other persons, including their grandparents.
- (b) whether the existing child support formula works fairly for both parents in relation to their care of, and contact with, their children.

The Committee has been asked to have regard to the Government's recent response to the report of the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group. A link to this report is available on the inquiry website.

For media comment from the Chair, please contact:
Mrs Kay Hull, MP (Chair), via tel: (02) 6921 4600

For further details on the inquiry, including background documentation,
contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4566 or visit the inquiry website at
www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fca/childcustody/