

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
By email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Online Submission

1 June 2012

Dear Committee

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into the National Children's Commissioner Bill 2012

The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, AWAVA, welcomes the establishment of the statutory office of the National Children's Commissioner within the Australian Human Rights Commission.

We note the Children's Commissioner will promote public discussion and awareness of issues affecting children and consult directly with children and representative organisations. AWAVA's focus is to ensure that all women and children are able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse and extends an offer to work closely with the National Children's Commissioner.

AWAVA is particularly supportive of the function of the National Children's Commissioner to "*promote discussion and awareness of matters relating to the human rights of children in Australia,*" 46MB (1) (b) and (c) "*undertake research, or educational or other programs, for the purpose of promoting respect for the human rights of children in Australia*" and anticipates this remit would include awareness of the impacts of all forms of gender-based violence on children, including:

- early and forced marriage
- female genital mutilation and cutting
- trafficking
- appropriate child protection and legal responses to children whose mothers/carers experience domestic or family violence and/or sexual violence or assault
- sufficient long-term housing and income support for single mothers who have left violent and abusive relationships
- gender-based bullying and sexual harassment in the school environment and through social media

AWAVA is pleased to see that under 46MB (4) *that the National Children's Commissioner may give particular attention to children who are at risk or vulnerable* and would urge that this is a key focus of the role and is much needed at a national level, especially for children that have experienced or who are experiencing gender-based violence, including those children from particularly marginalised groups.

We emphasise the importance of primary prevention work in addressing violence against women and their children, stopping violence before it occurs. Respectful relationship programs are only effective in changing behaviour and reducing violence against women and their children if:

- they are targeted to young boys and girls as well as older children
- underpinned by education about social inequalities, including gender inequality
- supported by role-modelling through a whole-of-school approach
- reinforced by teachers in both pre- and in-service training
- reflected in responsible media reporting and
- sustained by long-term social marketing campaigns to drive changes in community attitudes through whole-of-community approaches

We hope to see the National Children's Commissioner take a leadership role on the above issues, particularly in garnering cross-jurisdiction support for gender and social inequalities to be addressed in both the national curriculum and teacher training, focussing on younger children as well as teenagers, and involving children in this process.

We would caution that the funding allocation of \$3.5 million over 4 years is insufficient for this position to be meaningfully delivered.

For further information, please contact me on [

Yours sincerely

Julie Oberin
Chair of AWAVA



Who are we?

The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) is one of the six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government to bring together women's organisations and individuals across Australia to share information, identify issues and their solutions. AWAVA's focus is to *'ensure that all women and children are able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse'*. AWAVA recognises that gender violence is both a consequence and cause of gender inequality in all sectors of society and must be addressed by promoting women's empowerment. A key role for the Alliance is to ensure that women's voices are heard by Government.

For more information visit our website www.awava.org.au