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Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To whom it may concern

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide feedback to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's *Inquiry into the Family Law Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2017 and the Family Law Amendment (Parenting Management Hearings) Bill 2017*.

The feedback provided in this letter is directed to the Family Law Amendment (Parenting Management Hearings) Bill 2017. The QFCC does not have any feedback on the Family Law Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2017.

The QFCC supports the establishment of the Parenting Management Hearing Panel as an independent statutory authority to provide self-represented litigants with an alternative to the court process for resolving parenting disputes.

The QFCC acknowledges the evidence demonstrating that women and children are the primary victims of domestic and family violence. However, the wording in the Bill and the supporting documentation should reflect everyone's right to be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse during parenting management hearings application and determination. For example, paragraph 67 of the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill states "there are many safeguards included in the Bill which will support women and children's right to protection from exploitation, violence and abuse during the parenting management hearings application and determination process". This statement would benefit from inclusive language such as *parents and children's right to protection*.

The QFCC commends the integration of support services into the hearing process to minimise the intensity and duration of conflict, and to make sure families and children are better supported. Due to the consent-based nature of the parenting management hearings, consideration should be given to providing education and support services prior to and during an application for a hearing.

Specific resources are needed to educate parents and families seeking to apply to the parenting management hearing panel about the role and the processes associated with hearings. Education and information must be clear, concise and tailored to the target audience. The QFCC recommends a

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particular focus on child-friendly communication and education. Parents and other parties also need to be connected with appropriate support services to make sure they can provide fully informed consent before commencing the hearing process.

If you or your officers have any queries in relation to this matter they may contact Zara Berkovits, Manager Policy and Advocacy Leadership, on [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

Cheryl Vardon
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

7 FEB 2018