



National Office
4 Champion Street
Deakin ACT 2600

T 02 6259 0431
F 02 6259 0462

E natoffice@acl.org.au
W acl.org.au

ABN 40 075 120 517

17 December 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into the Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill 2010

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to comment on the Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill 2010.

ACL believes that all children are precious and deserve to be raised in a loving and safe family environment. Indeed, the overall health of a society can be judged by how the most vulnerable members of the community are treated by Government, of which children form a large portion.

The recent debate about whether there should be an R18+ classification rating for computer and video games, which was largely dominated by the voices of commercial and adult libertarian interests, demonstrates that the needs of children must be more prominent in Commonwealth policy debates. In this instance, even a joint statement by each of the eight State and Territory Children's Commissioners and Guardians went unheeded by the Commonwealth.

As a society we must do more to advocate for the best interests of children, but this must be done in a way that respects the lawful right of parents to raise their children according to their values and beliefs. The role of a Commissioner for Children must not usurp the role of parents, particularly in the realm of appropriate discipline and setting boundaries in the home.

ACL expresses concern about the use of 'children's rights' to increasingly deny parents the right to information about dependents in their care, particularly in relation to the provision of health services and advice, such as obtaining contraceptives and pregnancy termination.

The concern of parents about their right to educate their children on issues of sexuality and sexual health are borne out by initiatives of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to promote the provision of sex education to even very young children. Recent UNESCO guidelines suggest that, "It is never too early to start talking to children about sexual matters".¹

¹ http://www.c-fam.org/publications/id.1730/pub_detail.asp

Parents would rightfully be interested to ensure that any Children's Commissioner does not promote the sexual education agenda of the United Nations under the guise of 'children's rights'.

ACL is not opposed to the establishment of a Commonwealth Children's Commissioner, but is worried that the position will become politicised to focus on questionable children's rights to privacy and autonomy at the expense of respecting the legitimate rights and responsibilities of parents to raise their children in a way that accords with their values and beliefs.

An emphasis on the child at the expense of the wider family unit may not lead to balanced community outcomes. All children are in some way linked to a family and the interests of the child are intimately tied to the health and wellbeing of the entire family unit.

If a Commonwealth Children's Commissioner is to be established, ACL would like to see it created and maintained as a fully independent organisation as is proposed in the Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill 2010. In particular, ACL would not wish to see the role of the Commissioner subsumed within the scope of the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Yours sincerely,

Lyle Shelton
Chief of Staff