

Senate Submission: Julie-Ann Finney OAM

To: Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

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From: Julie-Ann Finney OAM - Mother of Petty Officer David Stafford Finney (1980 – 2019)

Introduction

This is my second (additional) submission

I am the mother of Royal Australian Navy Petty Officer David Stafford Finney, who died by suicide on February 1, 2019, after serving 20 years in the Defence Force. David was a decorated sailor, a devoted father, and a proud veteran. His death was preventable. It was the result of systemic failures within Defence, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), and the broader institutional culture that continues to fail those who serve.

In the wake of David's death, I led a national campaign that gathered over 400,000 signatures, ultimately resulting in the establishment of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide in 2021. I have attended every hearing and provided a witness statement detailing the circumstances of my son's service, discharge, and death. I now submit this to the Senate to express my grave concerns about Schedule 9 and its failure to deliver the structural reform we so desperately need.

Why Schedule 9 Fails Us

Schedule 9 is about acting on recommendation 122 from the Defence and Veteran Suicide Royal Commission (DVSRC). If the government acts on recommendation in the spirit and the intent of the final report, then a new body must be set up completely independent of the government.

In February 2025 the Parliament passed The Veterans Entitlements Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025. This did not need to be rushed through in the manner it was and most grass roots veterans and their families will agree that an opportunity was lost and the Act was a lazy piece of legislation that will see many veterans in the future, worse off than veterans of current times. When veterans realise the implication of Section 80 rewording (The severe impairment payment) and how it will change, it is going to ruin many lives. DVA has no right to be called into the Family Court. This again will contribute to the suicide of (mainly) men. The new legislation should be dealt with by the new independent body and with consultation with veterans. There was zero consultation on the Act. The minister simply sat on a stage and talked at veterans. This senate enquiry must also answer how the minister has come about his decisions. He does not child loss from veteran suicide, he does not know what it is to serve and he is advised by those groups whose voices have failed and continue to fail veterans. We need positive change and it is my belief it is achievable without extra money (rather a redistribution) and without the deaths of hundreds more veterans. When my son died, I knew I would need to continue fighting for change that would save lives, but I did not realise that, that fight would go on for more than 6 years and will probably continue for life due to the arrogance of many males in the veteran space who will not admit to failure. Please stop and think, the fight for a Royal Commission that went for decades, more than 3,000 sons and daughters dead since 1997, yet we continue to believe our empty words and our detrimental actions will be the change.

I implore you to let me address this Senate Enquiry and to actually consult on this new independent body. To save lives and to make the military a career of choice. It is little wonder that recruitment is down. As parents, many of us hope that recruitment diminishes further. We were proud when our children signed up and we knew that their life was at risk, but we did not realise that the most dangerous job of all was dealing with the Government, The ADF, DVA and many ex service organisations. When I realised just how the Government had taken the absolute easiest way out of dealing with the Royal Commission Report, I became very distressed. This caused the usual jibes of "emotional mother" "mental health issues" and the minister taking offence (his words) at me calling the legislation lazy. It is lazy. It is grief, anger and frustration caused by those that arrogantly believe they alone have the answers, those that ignore the spirit and intent of the Royal commission's report and those that ignore a mother's grief.

Don't Enlist Until it's fixed – that is certainly not now.

Sincerely,

Julie-Ann Finney OAM

Mother of Petty Officer David Stafford Finney (dec)