

From: Claude Chase [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 7 August 2003 8:55 PM
To: Committee, FCA (REPS)
Subject: Submission - Complaint regarding Child Support Agencies Secretary.

Submission No:.....1211.....
Date Received: 18-8-03

Dear Sir

I wish to lodge a complaint in regard to the manner that CSA does their business with clients.

I have always paid my maintenance since separating with my ex-wife.

Recently CSA re-assessed my maintenance without consultation. They then advised Centrelink, who reduced my ex-wife's welfare. I lost my employment in the middle of this process and advised CSA, to no avail.

The information they give was actioned by me to no avail. They have not at this time adjusted or advised Centrelink to readjust the welfare payments to my ex-wife, at a time when my family need support.

despite telling them I had no income, they persisted in blissful ignorance, every time I rang them up, to give me meaningless directions which proved to be a waste of time.

I have now written to the Registrar(Adelaide) and sought his intervention and action.

My main cause for concern is;

- a) CSA staff have treated us in a disgusting manner,
- b) They reduced my wife's welfare at a time when we needed empathy and understanding of our financial situation.
- c) One officer even told me I quote " had to go on the dole, so as to pay my ex-wife the minimum monthly payment (around \$24). I have never asked for welfare and have not had any income for 9 weeks, even though I have nothing in the bank.
- d) To see my children (visitation) it costs me around \$9200 per annum for airfares. Given that I have just started in another position, that pays \$42000 per annum, that means nearly one quarter of my annual income will be spent just to see my children, let alone the additional maintenance payments each month.
- e) Every time I ring the CSA up I get an answering machine, or someone else that cannot talk to me. What good is it when know one wants to talk to you?
- f) The information CSA send to Centrelink without consultation with the clients has to be stopped. What gives a public servant the right to make decisions on behalf of families without adequate and appropriate consultation.

As a father I have always been happy to pay maintenance for my children, however, I am angered that the CSA have become an autonomous haven for Public Servants that do not seem to understand plain English.

If fathers of children in separated families always get treated like this, then the system is wrong. I nearly had a nervous breakdown when I lost my employment and when CSA put me through the additional worry of trying to help my children, when I had no income at all, has disgusted me. Why am I, as a man who is happy to pay maintenance, treated like this when there are thousands out there who do not pay a cent?

On that basis I would ask that everything possible is done to stop these public servants becoming "demigods". Even when you ring up to complain, the call is intercepted and you get the run around.

My advice, set the any Centrelink welfare payments generically across the board based on;

- a) Taxable Income of Payer
- b) Fringe Benefits of Payer

c) No of Children involved

d) Visitation expenses

Stop the power CSA have to re-assess maintenance payments without consultation with both parents, when the parent (payer) is paying maintenance. Why would you fix a wheel that is not broken?

Establish a system that recognizes additional things such as;

a) sickness & health

b) changing family circumstances

c) unemployment

Allow parents that can agree on maintenance in writing, to request a review when they feel it is necessary, but abolish the rights of CSA to make changes without consultation. All this does is put my pressure on both parents and additional stress on the children of the marriage.

Set up a system where the calls come in to one place, where the correct information is given to the caller and where appropriate, the caller is connected to a person who can act on the information. This garbage of trying to contact one person (a case worker) is not necessary with modern computer files and shared databases. Every one that is at work should be able to assist clients, the client needs to be heard there and then as the information is relevant to the welfare of the children, or they would not be ringing in the first place.

Recognize that the isolation and tyranny of distance do impact on mail deliveries. CSA have a bad habit of demanding replies by due dates that expire before mail arrives. This alone creates annoyance, anger and frustration in the minds of clients.

In summary, I have to admit that the pressure of trying to get someone to understand that I was unemployed and my concern for my children when my ex-wife's welfare had been reduced, had me suicidal and struggling to remain composed. I am appalled and disgusted that good people, trying to do the right thing, are treated with contempt and ignorance.

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