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PART C: Submission

1. How would you describe the workplace culture(s) of the Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s) where you work/have worked? Please outline specific strengths and/or weaknesses in terms of workplace culture(s), based on your experiences, as appropriate.

I want to offer something different that is not about complaining about people in positions of authority and power. The culture, across the board, is unique because it has people who have been here forever because they are comfortable financially and have found themselves in a very niche area (parliamentary procedure work is very particular) which makes it difficult to move jobs even if they wanted to. Parliament House also has people who are transient, young, idealistic and not willing to put up with any nepotism, who are staffers who work long hours. This submission is about the former - those who have been here for more than 7 years. These positions are awarded to those who have knowledge and expertise. Not people, staffing or management skills - aka "soft skills". This is what has led to an appalling toxicity in parts of the Parliament House. Bullying is rife by those who are part of the furniture towards those who want to grow and improve work practices.

I would also like to add that one of the unique things about working in the Parliamentary departments is that you cannot simply be moved to another team (as a way of resolving conflict) because each team is expert and while person's skills are transferable, their knowledge is deficient in that new area. Too much weight is put on valuing expertise over a safe work environment.

2. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that already do, or could contribute to a safe and respectful environment in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

Internal HR supports are not sufficient. The people in those roles need to understand that a complainant does not approach them after simply a bad day. It takes significant gumption for a person to contact HR for support or to make a complaint. The premise too often feels like that the worker is a troublemaker or is upset because of a personality clash.

3. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that may contribute to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

While we increasingly call out bad behaviour, it never seems to go further than a warning or a request to 'rein it in'. This is in response to sexual harassment in particular.

4. Are you familiar with any Commonwealth parliamentary workplace policies, processes and/or practices in relation to staff and worker safety and wellbeing, workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If so, please outline your understanding of how these policies, processes and/or practices operate.

I am aware of them, and have used them. It is really inappropriate that the policy centres around resolving the grievance at the lowest level, because often the incident is between the worker and the immediate supervisor. Similarly, even a senior manager in the same reporting line is an inappropriate person to resolve the issues. They are often on side with the manager and want to just make it go away.

5. During your time working in a Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s), have/did you receive any education or training in relation to worker safety and wellbeing, and/or how to prevent or respond to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please outline your experience of the training and whether it was useful in increasing your knowledge and/or skills in relation to preventing and responding to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault.

No. I recall doing some bullying awareness training back in  The policies have changed a little since this time

and I think the policy no longer includes ostracism as a form of bullying which upsets me deeply. I am in an environment where my immediate manager refused to engage with me for [REDACTED] until I requested leave without pay. The genuine trauma has been significant.

6. Are you aware of how you and/or other people working in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces can report workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault (either formally or informally)? If yes, please specify what reporting options exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those reporting options if applicable.

Yes. My experience has not been satisfactory. Nothing got resolved. I have considered a formal complaint elsewhere but get fatigued at the thought of all the documentary work. I do have file notes and so on but it is in the "too hard, nothing will change" basket.

7. Are you aware of any supports available in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces to people who experience workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please specify what supports exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those supports if applicable.

Yes. I have used EAP for this purpose. It is role of the dice as to how useful that is. I am aware of sexual harassment and sexual assault support but haven't had to use them.

8. Based on your experiences, do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how to improve the prevention of and responses to workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

Please consider recommending that there be scrutiny over managers who have been in their roles for more than 5 or 7 years. These are the teams that become toxic. A manager and SES should not be in a role for that long; it's not a healthy workplace for anyone and at the manager level, staff are replaceable. They are not and should not be employed for their expertise, they should be there to manage staff.

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell the Commission?

I would like to have not been anonymous but genuinely feel that to name myself could lead to further targeting. This happened in the Senate Inquiry into the operation of parliamentary services and is upsetting.

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