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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.

The primary office I worked in was incredibly toxic. This was a result of the Senator's direct management of the office. Due to the fear of any career based consequences of seeking help, moving office without permission or standing up to offensive or bullying behaviour, all the staff were silent to the misbehaviour of the Senator. The office manager was unable to manage the workplace environment or control the constant stream of issues that came up as a result of this behaviour. The strength's were the staff, together, protected each other and consoled each other, however during outbursts remained silent as they witnessed other staff be berated in fear they'd be targeted next.

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?

An anonymous, private but formal process where poor behaviour can be addressed and managed and a way staff can safely exit their roles without fear of repercussions.

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

Unchecked power imbalance between Member's and Senator's and their staff. Paired with an overarching desire to kill off any potentially bad or politically toxic stories which could hard peoples careers (often the perpetrators). The "keep silent and you will continue to achieve" mentality that is taught from day 1 allows bullies and sexual harassers to get away with their behaviour.

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.

No.

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.

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.

No.

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.

We are offered psychologist sessions. It's confidential and helpful, but it's designed to repair trauma, not fix behaviour.

I used the psychologist service where I was recommended at the end of my sessions I leave my role - something I proceeded to do.

I really can't express how helpful these were at the time and recommend more sessions be available for staff.

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?

Staff need someone independent of parties they can go to for help, direction and advice.

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

Flexibility with staff is required in political roles, and should remain. However perpetrators of poor behaviour should be punished fairly.

I remind the Commission that in Parliament, the Presiding Officer kicks out unruly politicians and manages their behaviour in the Chamber - Such behaviour management should not cease at the Chamber doors.

No policy decision should be made that would create paralysis in hiring staff, the movement of labour within political officers or completely reverse the balance of power. What is required is a policy that can address the ongoing issues within Parliament without becoming a weapon that can be used in political warfare.

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