



Media Release

'Save the Lives of our Children'

Call for urgent submissions to Senate Inquiry into Rollback of 2006 Shared Parenting Reform

The Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation is calling for mothers, fathers and the people of Australia to make submissions by the deadline of 5pm, Friday, 29 April 2011 to the Senate Inquiry. Dads4Kids calls for submissions that reject the current Gillard government's proposed rollback of the very moderate 2006 shared parenting reforms.

The Family Law Legislation amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011 has been drafted on the basis that the proposed amendments will reduce child homicides. The reverse is actually the case. Statistics show that the 2006 Family Law Reforms helped save the lives of many children. The threatened rollback is likely to increase child homicides to pre-2006 levels which negates the purpose of the proposed Family Law Reforms.

Warwick Marsh, founder of Dads4Kids said, "Over the last few years a well orchestrated campaign has been mounted to make the claim that children are more at risk from violent fathers and that there has been an increase in child homicides at the hands of biological fathers.

The horrific death of Darcey Freeman at the hands of her father on the Westgate Bridge gave added impetus to that claim. This prompted a number of parliamentarians to consider that perhaps the shared parental responsibility changes in 2006 had taken a step too far.

Unfortunately those parliamentarians and the general public were unaware of another tragedy on the Westgate Bridge that occurred less than twelve months prior to Darcey's death. Mother, Gabriella Garcia, caused the horrific death of her 22 month old son Oliver by jumping off the Westgate Bridge with her son strapped to her chest, having made the claim she was afraid the Family Court might give custody of her son to the father. The tragic irony is that the father had made no applications to the court and had no intention of seeking custody. However this tragedy did not make headlines and the only recriminations were to criticise the authorities for not "jump proofing" the bridge. Sadly, both of these cases had involvement with the Family Law Court.

Bettina Arndt was right when she said, "No gender has a monopoly on vice." Both mothers and fathers are responsible for terrible tragedies involving their children. Whilst many have suffered grief because of these tragedies involving the death of innocent children, this is not cause for ill-considered and hasty change to a family law reform process that has actually reduced child homicides."

Warwick Marsh continued, *“It is often presumed that fathers are the main offenders in child homicide cases. However this is not the case. According to Men’s Health Australia, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) showed in its 2006-2007 annual report there were eleven homicides involving a mother and eleven homicides involving a male family member. However, when the ‘male family member’ category was broken down, five perpetrators were biological fathers and five were de-facto partners of the mother who lived with the child.*

A study in the Medical Journal of Australia found similar results. They stated that fatal child abuse was the most common cause of death and the offender was most commonly the child’s mother or her de-facto partner.

It might be noted that child homicide has reduced by almost 50% since the introduction of the much fairer 2006 reforms according to NSW figures. The NSW Child Death Team Annual Reports stated:

- *In 2005, twelve children aged between 0-17 died by fatal assault*
- *In 2007, nine children aged between 0-17 died by fatal assault. 2007 had the lowest child mortality rate observed over 1996-2007. This is the year directly after the reforms were instigated.*
- *In 2009, seven children aged between 0-17 died in six incidents.*

These results indicate the 2006 reforms reduced the lethal danger to children. It is our belief that child homicides could well go back to their pre 2006 levels with the new proposed reforms. This would be an appalling outcome for our children.”

Dads4Kids is calling for the people of Australia to flood the Senate Inquiry with single sentence submissions, rejecting the proposed bill, by Friday 29 April 2011. Those submissions should cite the lifesaving reduction in child homicides that has occurred since the onset of the 2006 shared parenting law reform.

Submissions may be made online at:

http://www.apf.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/family_law_familyviolence/index.htm

For media interviews please contact:

Warwick Marsh

0418 225 212

www.fatherhood.org.au