

Men's Health Forum

Speech by John Flanagan, Deputy Registered Officer of the Non-Custodial Parents Party (Equal Parenting).

Economic, social and political issues all affect men's health. As such, family law and child support legislation currently adversely affect both the mental and physical health of both parents and, in particular, the health of fathers.

The *Family Law Act* had 116 pages of legislation, when it was first passed by Parliament in 1975. The Act now consists of 695 pages – almost seven times the original amount. There is a mention in one section that “*the parents are encouraged*”. However nowhere in the *Family Law Act* does it say that “*parents shall decide*”.

The original *Child Support Act* had 109 pages when it was first passed by Parliament in 1988. Its direct successor, the *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act* now consists of 289 pages of legislation. Similarly the original *Child Support (Assessment) Act* had 179 pages in 1989, when it was first passed. Today there are 367 pages in the same *Act*.

This is more than a two fold increase.

These two (2) pieces of child support legislation have never used the words “*parents are encouraged*” or “*parents shall decide*”.

Under the Australian Constitution, there are three sources of power – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Each one is held to account by checks and balances of the other. However a fourth power has developed in Australia – the Bureaucracy. This Bureaucracy is elected by no one. In practice, it is accountable to no one.

However it is the Bureaucracy that decides “what is best” for everyone in this Country.

For example, proposed child support legislation is put forward to the Legislature by the *Child Support Policy* unit. Very little, if any, of that proposed legislation is ever changed. This *Child Support Policy* unit is part of the *Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*. It occupies level 8 of Juliana House, in Woden, ACT.

On the first and second floors of Juliana House is a unit called “*Office for Women*” – formerly the “*Office of Status of Women*”. On the immediate floors are the “*Children's Policy*” unit, the “*Women and Children Policy*” unit, the “*Family Policy and Research*” unit and the “*Children and Parenting Support*” unit. Finally there is the “*Safety Taskforce*” located in Brisbane.

All policy decisions that relate to parents and children are made by these Government bureaucrats. This is without making reference to the parents that are affected by their decisions.

Government bureaucrats think that they are the “third” parent and that we, as parents, are not capable of making decisions that affect both us and our children.

Bureaucrats are not the “parents”. Nor are they the parents of the “children” referred to in the legislation.

The real parents are us. We are the best people to determine what is in the best interests of our children – not the Government bureaucrats.

We need significant changes in policy and legislation to turn this situation around.

The adverse effects of Family law and child support legislation are a major reason for suicides, mental health problems and sickness in Australian

One solution is the implementation of a father friendly agency. It can be called an *Office of Status of Men* or it can be called an *Office of Well Being of Fathers and Sons*. This is immaterial.

Otherwise, we will continue to be a nation of timid sheep. This is with a one-sided Government Bureaucracy acting as our shepherd and at the same time causing massive problems to the health of men and fathers in this Country.

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