



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Mr Mark Parton MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

**Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying  
and violence in ACT schools**

**Submission Number:** 26

**Date Authorised for Publication:** 27 August 2019

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

08<sup>th</sup> July 2019

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is [REDACTED]. I read an article today on ABC News about the *Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools.*

I am aware that submissions closed in May 2019, however I wanted to advise the Committee of what happened to my daughter [REDACTED], several years ago, in Canberra.

[REDACTED] had been attending [REDACTED] School since Year 2. She was an extremely bright student, at the top of her class, very much at ease in the [REDACTED]. She had many friends, was very sociable and outgoing - this in spite of losing her father at the age of 4.

She continued at [REDACTED] School into Year 7, which is when she experienced extreme bullying. She was starting to deal with anxiety and grief issues relating to her father's death, at the same time as transitioning into high school - a difficult time for anyone that age. She tried to explain to her "friends" what she was going through. I also made sure, in the background, that her teachers were informed of her situation.

The bullying started along the line of students in her class mocking her, every day, saying "your father is dead", or "you don't have a father", and laughing at her.

I contacted the school, offering to come and facilitate a workshop, with school counsellors, about the impacts of grief on young children and adolescents, in order to turn it into an educational opportunity. I was told it was an interesting idea, but nothing ensued.

The incessant bullying around her anxiety, and the death of her father, escalated until [REDACTED] was told, by a boy in her class, to "go kill herself". As this was spelt out in an e-mail the boy had sent to her, I immediately took steps to inform the school.

They convened a meeting with myself and my partner [REDACTED]. They said the student would be adequately "punished", and told that it was wrong for him to do that. He was made to write a letter of apology to [REDACTED]. Again, I stated the necessity of perhaps turning this into an educational opportunity for the whole school year, but nothing was done about it. I also made sure I contacted [REDACTED] immediately [REDACTED]. I got a response from the [REDACTED] school, assuring me they would keep an eye on [REDACTED] and help her feel safe at school. I did not even get an acknowledgement of receipt of my letter from [REDACTED].

Nothing else was done at the time to ensure [REDACTED] would return to a safe class environment, something every student should be entitled to. [REDACTED] became extremely anxious to the point of not wanting to be in school, and feeling threatened when she was there. She refused point blank to go to school, and we became quite concerned about her mental health.

Again, a meeting was arranged with the school counsellors, my partner and myself, and this time with a Senior Psychologist from the Education Department. On re-iterating [REDACTED] reluctance to come to the school, the psychologist told us that every child needs encouragement, and that perhaps [REDACTED] would come to school if she was given \$10 every day. My partner and I looked at each other in absolute disbelief that this would even be a suggestion, from a seasoned professional. We were outraged when the conversation took a turn towards whether we wanted to keep [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED] as her grades had suffered already and she may not be able to continue her education [REDACTED]. It seemed the only concern of the school at the time was about maintaining their quota of "good" students in the [REDACTED], making sure that they would all pass [REDACTED] without fail.

On further advice by our family doctor to put [REDACTED] on Valium, we decided to move away from Canberra altogether, as we felt that [REDACTED] would not recover in an environment that had been so detrimental to her. We took her to

[REDACTED], where we had family and friends, and she spent a year recovering from the trauma she experienced, while working on strategies to curb her anxiety, with professional counsellors.

We know live in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] has adjusted extremely well in the local public school here. She has lots of friends again, and is very happy to go to school every morning - she says she feels very "relaxed" there. While she is still battling with anxiety issues, she has them under control, and is doing really well - we are incredibly proud of how far she has come in the past three years.

What I wanted to flag with this letter is the very inappropriate nature of the school's response to the bullying experienced by my daughter, and the ensuing anxiety issues it caused. There was, I will say it again, absolutely NO response whatsoever from the [REDACTED], after I sent him a long letter explaining [REDACTED] situation. The senior psychologist's strategy of "bribery" was just unacceptable. My proposal to have workshops around grief, anxiety, and other issues experienced by many high school students, was never taken up.

There needs to be policies in place in schools in order to deal with these sorts of incidents. I did not want the student to be "punished". I wanted him to understand the impact his words had had on [REDACTED] from an empathetic perspective. Not to be made to write a letter with other people's words in it, apologising to my daughter.

In short, I applaud the initiative of the ACT Government for conducting this inquiry. I hope it helps ACT Schools to draft policies around bullying, and to take action in more appropriate ways once bullying incidents have occurred.

Thank you for the time in reading this letter. I look forward to hearing from you, or to be kept informed of the Committee's findings on this very important issue.

