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24 June 2013

Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane Qld 4000

Via email: hcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: Written expression and submission to Health Ombudsman Bill 2013
An Independent Consumer and Community Perspective

Dear Health and Community Services Committee

I have viewed the content of the Health Ombudsman Bill and can see that there are important parts missing that need to be included. These are to do with functions performed by the Health Quality Complaints Commission (HQCC) around safety and quality monitoring; healthcare rights promotion to all; and functions regarding State wide service/facility healthcare investigating and reporting for improvement.

Health and hospitals as well as the community need monitoring, reports and information to ensure that Healthcare Safety and Quality Improvements are taking place. It is significantly important for self-assessment and the initiation of improvements in service provision and development of quality facilities across the State. It is fundamental to retain these functions in order for there to be a growing, developing and sustainable Queensland Health sector. It is counter productive to expect that prosecutions alone will change any system and serious systemic issues.

As a member of the public I feel that the introduction and functions of an Ombudsman including powers of prosecution is very important for the protection of the public. However, I think it is extremely important that 'all matters' are considered in consultation with medical experts (including independents); highly experienced office staff members; and community representatives for fair due and expedient process.

Further more in terms of the process of prosecution and proceedings, I most strongly disagree to any public disclosure by naming and shaming health practitioners. Although I have no objections to case summaries being posted from which lessons may be learnt, it is most important to de-identify individual practitioners in order to retain dignity which is a fundamental need and right of all human beings.

On a slightly different note I would like to express extreme disappointment that the press releases from the Ministers Office have failed to acknowledge the hard work, quality monitoring, investigating, reporting role, and process streamlining activities of the HQCC.

I have been witness to the Commissions huge increase in workload through sheer volume of complaints, and witness to the development and streamlining progress of their complaints lodgement, triage, early resolution and conciliation processes. The Commission has been working diligently to manage the huge increase in workload, along with all their other functions and obligations.

I feel that the work of the Health Quality Complaints Commission needs to be built upon and carried forward as part of the Bill. It is an excellent and strong foundation from which the Ombudsman can carry out functions competently and should be retained currently as it is, as an Office.

As a member of the public I would like to see the Bill incorporate the existing functions of the HQCC. To continue what has been established for oversight at the state level. I would like to commend the Minister for the introduction of the Health Ombudsman and functions of the Bill to protect the public, however to maintain confidence in the Bill undertakings must be procedurally fair.

Regards,

Helena Lake
Consumer Representative
Consumer and Community Advisory Committee
Health Quality and Complaints Commission