



Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity

Public Hearing Summary

Friday January 12, 2018 at 10:42 a.m.

Topic:

Inquiry into the Examination of the Inequality Faced by Single Fathers in Trinidad and Tobago with specific focus on custody matters, policies and access to programmes and services.

Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present for the public hearing:

- Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP – Chairman
- Mr. Esmond Forde- Member
- Mr. Kazim Hosein- Member

Witnesses who Appeared:

Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)

- Ms. Ian Ramdahin Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Antoinette Jack-Martin Director, Gender Affairs (Ag.)
- Mr. Bertrand Moses Child Development Coordinator
- Ms. Gaietry Pargass Senior Legal Advisor
- Ms. Amanda Ackbarali-Ramdial Child and Family Service Unit Manager
- Ms. Safiya Noel Director, Children's Authority

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)

- Mr. Asif Ali Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Mr. Troy Pollonais Deputy Director, (Ag.), Social Welfare Division
- Mrs. Vidya Pooransingh Director, National Family Services Division
- Ms. Angelique Taylor Director (Ag.), Social Policy and Research

Single Fathers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SFATT)

- Mr. Rhondall Feeles President/Director
- Mr. Wendell Grant Director
- Mr. Errol Fabian Director

Key Issues Discussed were:

1. The need for data on the number of single fathers in Trinidad and Tobago and the number of single fathers who apply for custody of their children to be compiled by organizations;
2. The perceived bias faced by single fathers to receive public assistance grants due to cultural perceptions of the male as the breadwinner;
3. The challenges of custodial fathers versus custodial mothers;
4. The need for a centralized definition for single fathers amongst the various stakeholders such as the SFATT, OPM and MSDFS;
5. The need for change in the traditional views that ‘children belong with mothers (only)’ to mitigate prejudice experienced by single fathers who apply for custody/ visitation rights;
6. The need to implement e-payments of maintenance in order to improve the efficiency of the payment process;
7. The inclusion of SFATT and other gender organizations in the consultation process for the Draft Parenting Policy;
8. The need to emphasize gender neutrality when administering the public assistance grants;
9. The Family Law (Guardianship Of Minors, Domicile And Maintenance) Act, Chap. 46:08 should be amended to allow for the consideration of the income and ability of the individual to pay the maintenance and a DNA test should also be included in the amendment to ensure that the individual paying the maintenance is the biological father;
10. The absence of response or satisfactory response to letters or requests for meetings from the Judiciary and the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago on breeches of Orders for Custody;
11. The need for coordination of all welfare efforts for single fathers by the various stakeholders;
12. The need for programmes to cater to the specific needs of single fathers and single parents at the OPM and MSDFS;
13. The support and counselling services provided to single fathers by the SFATT; and
14. The need for penalties for mothers who utilise false claims of domestic violence and sexual abuse to receive custody of the child from the father.

View the Hearing:

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:

<https://youtu.be/rJbBE-e57PQ>

Contact Information:

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jschumanrights@tparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2288/2627.

Committees Unit
January 15, 2018