 

People with disability, and our organisations and supporters, have been calling for a Royal Commission into the epidemic of violence against us for many years. Recently, we have had cause to hope that our long campaign for justice was over. Yet while we greeted the Prime Minister’s announcement of the formation of our Royal Commission on Friday with hope and relief, this was quickly followed by concern about the appointment of some of the Commissioners. Sadly, we believe two of those appointed have significant conflicts of interest that threaten the integrity of the Royal Commission process. In addition, we want all Commissioners to fully declare any and all potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interests, and be willing to step aside from hearings that involve their conflicts of interest.

People with disability, and our organisations and supporters, call for the Hon. John Ryan, AM, and Ms Barbara Bennett, PSM, to step down as Commissioners for our Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, due to the real, perceived and potential conflicts of interest arising from their past roles.

We need to have complete confidence that our Royal Commission is a place where we can give evidence safely. People with disability must be able to tell our stories to Commissioners, knowing that we can seek and receive justice from them and the body they represent. We need to feel safe in telling our stories, some of which involve the public institutions and bureaucracies that have been responsible for violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Therefore, the Commissioners for our Royal Commission need to be above reproach, free of any perceived or potential bias or influence and have the primary interests of people with disability at the heart of what they do. Over the last few weeks, we have put forward many names of highly respected and well qualified people with disability, and our supporters, who could serve as Commissioners.

The broad disability community, and our supporters, believe that Mr Ryan and Ms Bennett have significant conflicts of interest due to their past roles and, if unaddressed, this may threaten the integrity and participation of people with disability in our Royal Commission.

Mr Ryan, as a very recent senior public servant for the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (Ageing, Disability and Home Care), has been involved with oversight of residential care programs for people with disability in NSW. Ms Bennett was recently the Deputy Secretary of the Families and Communities Branch of the Department of Social Services (DSS) in the Commonwealth Government, and at various times oversaw the Commonwealth workplace health and compensation scheme, the National Redress Scheme, welfare, family safety, housing and homelessness, and grants to the disability sector. DSS also funds and oversees disability services and Australian Disability Enterprises. Therefore, both had responsibility for organisations that are likely to come under significant scrutiny by our Royal Commission. As such, their involvement raises major concerns about their conflict of interest, whether potential, perceived or real.

We understand that Mr Ryan and Ms Bennett are respected public servants who sought to make a positive contribution to ending abuse and violence through this Royal Commission. However, we believe this work would be best served if they acknowledged their real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest and step aside. We call upon them to do this today in the best interests of people with disability, and the integrity of our Royal Commission.

**Signed by:**

* Disabled People’s Organisations Australia
* First Peoples Disability Network Australia
* People with Disability Australia
* National Ethnic Disability Alliance
* Women With Disabilities Australia.
* Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
* Inclusion Australia
* Community Disability Alliance Hunter
* Down Syndrome Australia
* Brain Injury Australia
* NSW Council of Intellectual Disability
* Disability Advocacy Network of Australia
* NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance
* Physical Disability Council of NSW
* Family Advocacy (NSW)
* Disability Advocacy NSW
* 2RPH (Radio for People with Print Disability)
* Intellectual Disability Rights Services
* Ability Advocacy
* IDEAS
* Advocacy for Inclusion (ACT)
* RDAS Regional Disability Advocacy Service (NSW & Vic)
* Blind Citizens Australia
* Disability Resource Centre (Vic)
* Queensland Advocacy Inc.
* Leadership Plus (Vic)
* AED Legal Centre (Vic)
* Gold Coast Disability Advocacy
* Speak Out Advocacy (TAS)
* People with Disabilities WA
* Developmental Disabilities WA
* Southern Disability Advocacy  (Vic)
* Queenslanders with Disability Network
* Rights in Action (Qld)
* Amparo (Qld)
* Valid (Vic)
* Women With Disabilities ACT
* Colac Otway Region Advocacy Service
* Spinal Cord Injuries Australia
* Rights Information & Advocacy Centre Inc. (Vic)
* Melbourne East Disability Advocacy
* ADACAS (ACT)
* Deaf Australia
* Deafblind Australia
* A4 (Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia)
* Side by Side Advocacy
* Deafness Forum of Australia
* Disability Justice Australia
* Enhanced Lifestyles
* People with Disabilities ACT
* Physical Disabilities Australia
* National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples
* National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
* All Means All – The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education
* Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service Inc
* South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS)
* Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education
* Starting With Julius
* Sisters Inside
* Disability Clothesline
* National Older Women’s Network Australia INC
* Speaking Up For You (SUFY)
* Grampians Disability Advocacy
* Bolshy Divas
* National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
* Brain Injury Matters
* National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
* Stroke Recovery Association
* ADAM Inc
* Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association
* Macleod Accommodation Support Service Inc
* Women’s Electoral Lobby
* Craig Wallace
* Christina Ryan
* Geoff Trappett, Inclusion Moves
* Claire Spivakovsky, University of Melbourne
* Dinesh Wadiwel, University of Sydney
* Linda Steele, University of Technology, Sydney
* Catia Malaquias
* Dr Jocelynne A. Scutt, Barrister & Human Rights Lawyer, Cambridgeshire County Councillor
* Sharon Gray
* Steven Yates
* Noel P Muller
* Kristin Gillespie
* Dr Elisabeth Kramer, University of Sydney
* Toni Rugen
* Deb Haller, Advocate, QCIE
* Chanelle McKenna
* Gail Simpkins
* Dr Anna Arstein-Kerslake, Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne
* Sue Tape
* Debbie Kilroy
* Elisabeth Ellis
* Amy Calladine
* Dr Joseph Naimo, University of Notre Dame Australia
* Jennie Keough
* Belinda Rigby
* Julie Guilfoile
* Jim Guilfoile
* Glenda Lee
* Elaine Butler
* Naomi Clarke
* Sue Gilbey
* Julia Haraksin
* Ian Irwin
* Geoff Millican
* Larissa MacFarlane
* Taya Nielsen
* Natali Pearson
* Dr Narelle Warren, Monash University
* Jacqui Narvaez-Jimenez
* Ann-Marie Loebel

 

   



 



  

             

  