Submission to Committee Enquiry.

I have never done this before and I hope I am not about to make a goose of myself. But as a parent of a twenty two year old daughter with an intellectual disability, I thought I had better have my say, and hopefully put some perspective into the arguments.

My daughter has a chronological age of twenty two, but her mental age is closer to nine or ten. It has not significantly altered in the last ten years, and this I am assured is about as good as it gets.

Thankfully my daughter did not start menstruating till she was nearly sixteen. Her immediate response, that she was now a woman, was very positive. However her wanting to show the class the evidence of her newly found womanhood was not. Thankfully the teachers were able to head this off for me.

She has some trouble at period time. They are very heavy and her personal hygiene can be questionable. Mainly due to the fact that she gets half way through a task and then forgets what she was doing. We have implemented a regime where she has periods only four times a year. She is currently using the contraceptive pill, and due to a constant regime she never forgets. We time her periods for holiday times to make it easier for her and everyone else.

Though we have managed her feminine maturity, there have been some 'accidents' which have been very upsetting to my daughter. We tend to wave away the lookers and jeerers, but they can be very distressing, especially since strangers look at her and do not perceive her intellectual problems.

Two years ago I let me daughter go on a Lions' camp for young adults with similar disabilities. It was a long bus trip from Orange to Licola in Victoria. She had a wonderful time at camp and then the long bus trip back. As the buses had picked up people along the way all over NSW, they reversed this on the way home. After many had been dropped off, her bus had very few occupants and it was getting very late, so many fell asleep. She was invited up the back of the bus and coerced into sex with a young man.

I did not find this out from my daughter, but from her care provider who overheard her telling another client at her day program. After much questioning she told us that the person involved was a carer on the trip and that he specifically told her not to tell her parents. After much soul searching I decided that she had to go the police. The police woman was wonderful. I did not want to attend the interview, though I was outside in case she needed an interpreter, as my daughters language can be difficult to understand. My daughter told her everything. Thankfully, the whole experience was not traumatic, as she told the police that she had indeed enjoyed it very much.

Follow up by the Police found that the young man in question was not a carer, but was a client on the camp. Though he was older, not as innocent and more 'higher functioning' than most that attended the camp. The Lions' club were devastated that this had happened. She was taken advantage of, plain and simple. She did not have the

mental capacity to understand that this guy was not being nice to her; he was being selfish and using her for his own gratification.

If we had not had her on the contraceptive pill, she may well have gotten pregnant. As it was we had to run the whole gamut of STD tests, as he did not use a condom, and my daughter had no idea what this was or how it should be used. We have had a sexual counsellor come to the day program since this episode, and have had discussions with the young women who attend this program.

Everyone has rights, and simply because you have a disability your rights should not be discounted. However, I believe that this question is so much more. Should my daughter be able to have a boyfriend? Yes. Should my daughter be able to have consensual sex? Yes. But should my daughter be able to have children? No. She can barely look after herself. If your ten year old daughter came home and was pregnant, wouldn't you be upset? She would not understand what was happening to her body. She would not understand why she was in so much pain, during labour. She would be incapable of looking after a baby adequately. In the end she would have more pain as DOCS stepped in and took her baby away, and she would not understand this either. Or else we as her parents would have to look after this child, as well as the mother and probably the father as well.

Blanket statements just do not work. I am sure that there are some people out there with disabilities that would cope with everything, but there are those out there that wouldn't, placing extra pressure on their families, carers or just the system. It is my belief that each case should be looked at individually, as disabilities are as different as the people who live with them.

Thank you for reading my submission.