

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT METHODS AND IMPACTS OF
CULTS AND ORGANISED FRINGE GROUPS**

Name: Name withheld

Date Received: 18 June 2025

Name
withheld

Submission Text: To the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. My name is [REDACTED]. I am [REDACTED] years old and I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness in Victoria from birth until I left home for the third and final time at age 14. I was never baptised, but I remained convinced it was "the truth" well into adulthood – until I was 35 years old. For over three decades, I lived with the deep belief that I was fundamentally broken, unable to live up to the standards demanded by the organisation. It has taken intensive therapy, rebuilding, and the support of professionals to understand that what I experienced was not my fault — it was abuse.

I am submitting this to provide testimony of the lifelong harm that Jehovah's Witnesses, as a high-control group, have inflicted on me and my family. I want this inquiry to recognise the systemic coercion, silencing, and psychological, physical, and sexual abuse that occurs within the organisation, shielded from legal accountability by doctrine, secrecy, and fear.

My Childhood: Abuse and Isolation Within the Organisation

I was born into the religion. My father was raised a Jehovah's Witness; my mother became one after meeting him. On the outside, the congregation appeared to be a supportive community. Ours had around 300 members, and as a child I felt like I belonged. But behind closed doors, there was constant fear and control. My father was a violent alcoholic who beat my mother and us children. I have six older siblings, but I didn't even know some of them existed growing up because they had been disfellowshipped, and we were forbidden from speaking to them. I first met one of my own brothers after I left at 16.

My brother closest in age to me is gay. He was constantly degraded by congregation

members and elders alike, told he was “disgusting” and would be killed at Armageddon if he didn’t change. I tried to protect him, and for that, I was beaten more severely by my father. I was regularly told that I was a disgrace to Jehovah for asking questions — and questions were not tolerated. Instead of stepping in to help, the elders defended my father and punished us further. Once, when I went to a meeting with a black eye, another member asked what had happened. I said “Dad hit me,” and I was immediately pulled aside by two elders and told that if I had just done what I was told, it wouldn’t have happened.

Education Discouraged, Freedom Forbidden

School was never encouraged — it was seen as irrelevant. We were taught that worldly education would be useless in the “new system” after Armageddon. I missed large parts of school due to beatings and being kept home. Elders advised my parents that we should leave school early and dedicate our lives to preaching work.

We were also completely isolated. I wasn’t allowed to associate with non-Jehovah’s Witness children (called “worldly” children) because they were seen as bad influences. But I was also considered a bad influence within the congregation because I asked too many questions. I wasn’t allowed to form friendships with anyone — not inside or outside. Even having a conversation with a disfellowshipped family member was punishable. You could be shunned or disfellowshipped just for that.

Sexual Abuse and Institutional Betrayal

I was sexually abused by my uncle as a child. When I disclosed this to elders, I was interviewed alone at age 9 without either of my parents present. I was asked humiliating, degrading questions: where did he touch me, where did I touch him, did I think he liked it, did I like it, what was I wearing, why didn’t I just leave, where were my parents? It was

interrogative and accusatory. I was retraumatised, and nothing came of it. The police were never contacted — in fact, we were explicitly told not to go to the police. My mother was shunned just for suggesting it might be necessary, accused of bringing reproach on Jehovah's name.

I now know that this kind of internal handling of abuse is widespread in the organisation, and that elders have been documented telling others to destroy records or refrain from creating written reports that could be subpoenaed. They keep detailed files on people, yet selectively erase evidence when it threatens their image.

Ongoing Psychological Control and the Cost of Leaving

The fear that is instilled from childhood is deep. We were taught that the world is ruled by Satan, that police and governments are not to be trusted, and that anyone who is not a Jehovah's Witness would soon die at Armageddon. I never learned how to build deep, meaningful relationships because we were told it was pointless to invest in people who were "soon to perish." This indoctrination left me traumatised and disconnected.

I ran away from home for the first time at 12. I was already using prescription medication — my mother would give us Valium after beatings so we could sleep and forget. I eventually became addicted to ice and found myself in violent, toxic relationships, just like the one I was raised in. I didn't know any different, and I didn't seek help, because I didn't believe anyone outside the religion could be trusted.

Despite the violence in our home, my father was never disfellowshipped. His punishment for physically abusing his wife and children was that he was taken off "microphone duties" at the meetings — a task he had taken pride in. That was it. Meanwhile, members could be disfellowshipped for something as minor as being seen in a nightclub, or wearing a skirt

deemed too short.

The hypocrisy and control are suffocating.

What I Am Asking This Inquiry to Do

The Jehovah's Witness organisation, in my experience and in the experience of many others, operates as a high-control group that uses manipulation, fear, and shame to silence members and protect abusers. It is not enough to look at this through a lens of belief or theology — this is about systemic, organised harm.

I am asking for:

- Mandatory reporting of sexual abuse and removal of internal processes that shield abusers from accountability.
- The end of disfellowshipping practices, especially for family members, which causes lifelong trauma and isolation.
- An investigation into their no-blood policy, which has led to preventable deaths, including those of my father and grandmother. They were celebrated for “dying faithful,” but they died because of coercion and misinterpretation of scripture.
- Legal accountability for the destruction of documents and cover-ups. This group keeps detailed internal records of abuse — and then instructs elders to destroy them to protect the organisation.

I was robbed of an education, a family, a childhood, and a chance to develop the

emotional tools most people take for granted. Only in the last five years have I begun to rebuild relationships with the siblings I was forbidden from seeing. I have spent most of my life trying to survive what was done to me under the guise of faith. I want to ensure no other child, no other woman, no other family has to go through this and be silenced by a system that prioritises its image over its people.

Please don't underestimate how dangerous this group is — and how much damage they continue to cause in silence.

Thank you for hearing my voice.

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[REDACTED], Victoria

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