

From: [Candice Heggelund](#)
To: [sentencingcouncil](#)
Subject: Submission to the NSW SC on the Use of Good Character References in Child Sexual Assault Cases
Date: Tuesday, 11 February 2025 10:45:04 PM

As a deeply concerned citizen and mother of two young children, I strongly oppose the use of good character references in the sentencing of convicted child sexual assault offenders. This outdated and harmful practice undermines the pursuit of justice, dismisses the lived experiences of survivors, and perpetuates dangerous myths about child sexual abuse and the perpetrators of such heinous crimes.

It is inherently contradictory to describe someone who has sexually abused a child as a person of “good character”. Child sexual abusers frequently manipulate perceptions of their morality and trustworthiness, carefully crafting a public image designed to deceive those around them. This facade not only allows them to evade suspicion but also facilitates their ability to commit further abuse.

Permitting good character references to influence sentencing sends a devastating message to survivors. It diminishes their trauma, creates a false equivalence between the offender’s crimes and any supposed “contributions” to society, and risks retraumatizing those who have already endured so much. Worse still, it can discourage other survivors from coming forward, perpetuating silence and enabling continued abuse.

The sentencing process must unequivocally prioritise the safety, dignity, and justice of survivors while holding offenders fully accountable for their actions. To achieve this, the use of good character references in cases of child sexual assault must be eliminated.

I urge the NSW SC to take decisive action to remove this harmful practice from the sentencing process. The justice system must reflect the severity of these crimes and commit to protecting societies most vulnerable - our children.

Yours sincerely,

Candice Heggelund