

1 August 2011

The Hon Wendy Lovell MLC
Minister for Housing, Children and Early
Childhood Development
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Minister Lovell

Re: your request that I provide you with my impressions as a result of attending "Children's" Beauty Pageant at Northcote Town Hall Saturday 30 July 2011.

I attended the 'Pageant', and spent 2½ hours observing from the audience.

There were about 150 people in attendance. The audience seemed to comprise of children and families and friends of participants. Children paraded before judges in age groups from toddlers to adolescents.

Whilst I was present, my overall impression was one of people having fun. Whilst many of the children (95% females) seemed a bit overawed, some even bewildered, there was no dynamic of unsafe or coercive practice.

I spoke to members of the audience, parents, kids and others, and they all seem pretty happy and enthusiastic. Whilst entrance fees, I'm told are almost \$300 per child, nobody complained. Costumes and dresses, were extraordinarily 'glitzy' and looked like they would be costly, a few Mothers told me they make them or have them made within the group.

The overriding commercial aspect of the event was typified through stalls at the back of the hall, merchandising 'glitzy' paraphernalia.

Children were often wearing heavy make-up, and dresses were of adult like design, though I didn't get a feeling of over sexualisation, rather adolescent awkwardness.

Parents were supporting their charges, as parents do at many children's competitions and displays that I have witnessed as a parent, grandparent, and in my role as Child Safety Commissioner.

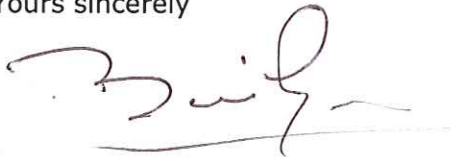
Whilst personally, I found the Pageant to be not of my personal taste, I saw nothing sinister, unsafe or degrading during my visit.

Minister, in my opinion we should remain vigilant around children's pageants, simply because they are based on a perception of competitive beauty and personal appearance.

If future events become more intense and more competitive, I would be concerned about children's long term self worth being dependant upon how attractive they were judged to be.

Happy to meet with you for further conversation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernie Geary', with a horizontal line underneath.

Bernie Geary OAM
Child Safety Commissioner