

28 October 2016

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Australian Crime Commission Amendment (Criminology Research) Bill 2016

Dear Secretary

I write this submission as someone strongly opposed to the Australian Crime Commission Amendment (Criminology Research) Bill 2016, a bill aimed at merging the activities of Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) with the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC).

These entities have very different roles. The AIC is a national research and knowledge centre on crime and justice which seeks to promote justice and reduce crime by undertaking and communicating evidence-based research to inform policy and practice. The ACIC on the other hand works with law enforcement partners to improve the ability to stop criminals exploiting emerging opportunities and perceived gaps in law enforcement information. One is a research agency, the other essentially an intelligence and investigative agency. While one would hope for strong relationships between the agencies I would submit that the independence of the AIC from the ACIC is paramount in terms of its ability to conduct and fund objective and independent research.

This independence is not just important for a continuing understanding of crime and justice issues in Australia, it is important because many problems that AIC based research might legitimately seek to understand would have little interest to the investigative and intelligence brief of the ACIC. A merger would also undermine public confidence in the independence of the AIC.

As a recipient of research grants through the Criminology Research Grant program run by the AIC I worry that the type of research I've been involved in might not be of interest to the merged AIC/ACIC. Important projects on sexting and young people, policing LGBTI communities, or detainees perceptions of body worn cameras are, I suspect, quite a long way from the concerns of the ACIC. Nonetheless, they are important policy issues to tackle and I applaud the AIC for funding them. Indeed, the Australian criminological community has benefited from, and value added to, the work of the AIC to the extent that a change in the nature of its work or brief could be highly detrimental to criminological work in Australia more generally.

An independent AIC is vital to our understanding of crime and justice in Australia.

Yours Sincerely
Professor Murray Lee
Sydney Law School
Editor: Current Issues in Criminal Justice