

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

12th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday  
6 September 2023

PE1905: Public Inquiry into the response of  
religious organisations to allegations of child  
sexual abuse since 1950

<b>Lodged on</b>	25 October 2021
<b>Petitioner</b>	Angela Rosina Cousins on behalf of the UK XJW's Support
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to order a public inquiry into the actions taken by religious organisations in response to child sexual abuse allegations since 1950.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1905">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1905</a>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [7 December 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new submission from the Deputy First Minister which is set out at **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 144 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales issued its [report on Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings](#) in September 2021. Many of the issues identified in its report are similar in nature to concerns raised by the petitioner.
9. Members may also wish to note that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales published its [final report in October 2022](#). The report makes reference to child abuse in religious organisations throughout and covers many issues that are similar in nature to the concerns raised by the petitioner. The report makes 20 detailed recommendations, including:
  - Recommendation 2: Child Protection Authorities for England and for Wales. (page 328)
    - The Inquiry recommends that the UK government establishes a Child Protection Authority for England and the Welsh Government establishes a Child Protection Authority for Wales.
  - Recommendation 9: Greater use of the barred list (page 336)
    - The Inquiry recommends that the UK government enables any person engaging an individual to work or volunteer with children on a frequent basis to check whether or not they have been barred by the Disclosure and Barring Service from working with children. These arrangements should also apply where the role is undertaken on a supervised basis.
  - Recommendation 13: Mandatory reporting (page 341)
    - The Inquiry recommends that the UK government and Welsh Government introduce legislation which places certain individuals – ‘mandated reporters’ – under a statutory duty to report child sexual abuse.
  - Recommendation 19: Redress scheme (page 351)
    - The Inquiry recommends that the UK government establishes a single redress scheme in England and Wales, taking into account devolved responsibilities. (non-State institutions are included in the eligibility criteria)

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

# PE1905: Public Inquiry into the response of religious organisations to allegations of child sexual abuse since 1950

## Petitioner

Angela Rosina Cousins on behalf of the UK XJW's Support

## Date lodged

25/10/2021

## Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to order a public inquiry into the actions taken by religious organisations in response to child sexual abuse allegations since 1950.

## Previous action

I contacted my MSP about this matter who I believe also spoke to the relevant Government Minister.

## Background information

I am a survivor of child sexual abuse. Like many others, when I reported that I was abused, I was failed by people within my church.

I supplied my evidence to the inquiry for England and Wales however, they could not use it as that inquiry didn't pertain to Scotland. Although there is a Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, it is focussed on investigating the abuse of children in care.

There needs to be an investigation into the response of religious organisations, who were informed about allegations of abuse against children who were not in care. I would like the inquiry to investigate how many victims and how many alleged abusers there were, and what these organisations did to protect the victims.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales has just released its report. Scotland now needs its own inquiry.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1905 on 7 December 2022

**The Convener:** Our next continued petition is PE1905, on the public inquiry into the response of religious organisations to allegations of child sexual abuse since 1950, which was lodged by Angela Rosina Cousins on behalf of UK XJW's Support. It calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to order a public inquiry into the actions that were taken by religious organisations in response to child sexual abuse allegations since 1950.

The committee will recall the evidence that we heard directly from Angela about her experiences and the issues that she would like to see addressed. I once again thank her for taking the time to speak with the committee on what is a particularly difficult topic.

At our most recent consideration of the petition, we agreed to write to the Scottish Government to highlight the evidence session and the findings of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales. That inquiry has now published its final report, which sets out 20 detailed recommendations, some of which relate directly to the suggestions that Angela has made. Our papers highlight the relevant recommendations.

The Deputy First Minister has responded to the committee and has reiterated that, if the remit of the Scottish child abuse inquiry was widened, it would add years on to the timeline, which would produce negative outcomes for survivors. The Deputy First Minister considers neither that the scope of the inquiry should be extended, nor that a separate inquiry should be established to consider abuse that took place in non-residential religious organisations.

The Scottish Government has set out a number of alternative measures, including engagement with faith leaders and a public consultation as part of work to develop the national child protection guidance in Scotland 2021. That guidance covers reporting practice, creation of policies and procedures, and careful vetting processes in religious settings.

Angela has provided a written submission to the committee, which includes links to relevant articles in support of her petition. She points to the research that was undertaken by the inquiry in England and Wales in order to reach a decision on mandatory reporting, highlighting the importance of that for victims in insular organisations. Angela says that religious organisations that do not wish to engage will not be required to do so. Angela states that religious leaders should be mandatory reporters and that training should be provided alongside PVG checks—under the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007—as part of any vetting process.

We have heard evidence and we have seen the recommendations from the inquiry in England and Wales. We have, yet again, received the Deputy First Minister's

assertion that the Scottish Government is not willing to expand the scope of the current inquiry or even to initiate a separate inquiry. We have also received Angela's response further to all of that.

What comments or suggestions do colleagues have, given what seems to me to be the intransigent position with which we are confronted?

**David Torrance:** It is a very difficult situation if the Scottish Government is not going to move on the matter at all. I wonder whether we could write to the Government, highlighting the recommendations of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales. We could ask that it consults on the introduction of legislation that places certain individuals—mandated reporters—under a statutory duty to report child sexual abuse, and that it considers the need for and value of a child protection authority for Scotland.

**The Convener:** I am very happy to support that proposal. Are colleagues happy to support it?

I do not particularly want to lose sight of the conviction that we as a committee came to on the back of the evidence that we heard that the Government's position is wrong-headed. I wonder whether colleagues would be prepared to invite the clerks to draft a letter summarising our conclusion on the back of the evidence that we have heard that the Scottish child abuse inquiry, notwithstanding everything that the Government has said, should have its terms of reference extended, or that there should be an investigation into the possibility of establishing an alternative inquiry based on the evidence that we have heard during our consideration of the petition.

Are colleagues content for us to proceed on that basis?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We will keep the petition open, and we will proceed on the basis of the two suggestions that have been made.

## Annexe C

### Deputy First Minister submission of 20

January 2023

### PE1905/G: Public Inquiry into the response of religious organisations to allegations of child sexual abuse since 1950

Thank you for your letter following up on the above petition dated 14 December 2022.

I note your recommendation that the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry's (SCAI) terms of reference be extended to include religious organisations or that a separate inquiry is established to look into the issues raised by the petitioner.

As stated in my previous letter of 21 June 2022, I previously considered whether to widen SCAI's remit to include abuse in different settings and concluded that this was not practicable as it would mean that SCAI would therefore take many more years to reach its completion. In turn, this would therefore mean the Government would fail to meet its commitment to survivors of in-care abuse.

Despite the important issues raised in this petition, I stand by this decision. Indeed, widening the scope of the inquiry at all would mean that various settings – not just religious organisations – would need to be considered, thereby potentially making such an inquiry unmanageable in scope.

It is important to note that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has already considered similar issues to those raised by the petitioner, albeit in England and Wales. As you point out in your letter, many relevant recommendations have been put forward by that Inquiry, and I can assure you that the Scottish Government will consider these. In addition, it is likely that SCAI will result in many learnings and recommendations that are also relevant for other settings, such as religious organisations, which will also be considered and taken forward as appropriate.

It is clear that there already are, and will continue to be, many lessons and recommendations for us to consider in this area. Rather than devoting several years to a separate inquiry, it is therefore imperative that we dedicate resources and attention to ongoing work to ensure that public bodies and all local areas across Scotland implement our National Guidance for Child Protection. We are providing a support and challenge function to ensure that safeguarding and child protection is robust and central to the culture and practice of all relevant bodies and that we accompany bodies on the constant improvement journey that implementation of the GIRFEC approach, child protection, and children's rights necessitates.

I hope that the Committee and petitioner find the information above helpful.

**Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP**