

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 23  
March 2022

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

## Note by the Clerk

<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 [1 December 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to invite the petitioner to give evidence to the Committee. It also agreed to write to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.
2. At today's meeting, the Committee will take evidence from the petitioner Angela Cousins. A separate questions paper is provided for Members as **Paper 4 (private paper)**.
3. 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**.
4. The Committee has received a new response from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse which is set out in **Annexe C**.
5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

## 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

25/10/21

## 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, and she spoke with the relevant Scottish Minister who suggested that Mandatory Reporting Laws are already in place in Scotland. However, this is not my experience.

## 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 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021

**The Convener:** PE1905, on the response of religious organisations to allegations of child sexual abuse since 1950, has been lodged by Angela Rosina Cousins on behalf of UK XJWs Support. It calls 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.

The petitioner is a survivor of child sexual abuse who believes that she was failed by people in her church when she reported her abuse. She has provided further details of her experiences in a late submission, which has been shared with the committee. She calls for an investigation into the response of religious organisations that were informed about allegations of abuse against children who were not in care.

The petitioner argues that the scope of the current Scottish child abuse inquiry is too narrow, as it is able to investigate only the abuse of children in care. In contrast, the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales has powers to investigate abuse in religious organisations generally and the inquiry recently published a report on the topic.

The Scottish Government states that there was extensive consultation and engagement with abuse survivors in relation to the Scottish child abuse inquiry's remit and acknowledges that

“there was not unanimity on the extent of the remit amongst survivors, and that some wished for the remit to be broadened.”

In 2016, the Deputy First Minister addressed this issue directly, stating:

“If we set a remit that, in practice, would take many more years to conclude, we fail to respond to the survivors of in-care abuse who have taken us at our word, in Government and in Parliament, that we will learn from their experience and, by addressing the systematic failures that existed, ensure that it can never happen again.”—[Official Report, 17 November 2016; c 41.]

The Scottish Government states that it has no plans to reconsider the remit of the Scottish child abuse inquiry.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

**Paul Sweeney:** The petitioner's submission is harrowing and it would be good to invite her to give evidence orally to the committee if possible. That would be an appropriate first step.

**Alexander Stewart:** There is no doubt that there is scope to do work on the petition, because of the situation. As the Scottish child abuse inquiry has a narrow remit, to ensure that survivors do not feel they are not being listened to or that their experiences are not being acted upon, it would be useful for us to take some more evidence on the matter to clarify it. The last thing that we want is for survivors to feel that, under the circumstance that we have in Scotland, they are not being given parity with what is happening in other parts of the United Kingdom. There is currently a belief that that is the case. For that reason alone, we need to be open and up front about the matter.

**Bill Kidd:** I agree with my colleagues.

**The Convener:** We will invite the petitioner to give evidence. I wonder whether there is any information that we might obtain from the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales on how it has determined the scope of its inquiry and is going about exercising its powers, as well as what additional complications have arisen for it in the light of that. We could notify the Scottish Government that we are inviting the petitioner to give evidence and let it know when that takes place, so that it is aware, and we could indicate that we might be minded to invite the Deputy First Minister to give evidence subsequent to the petitioner.

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Marie, did you hope to come in as well?

**Marie McNair:** No, I am okay. I am in agreement with the rest of you.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

## Annexe C

### Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse submission of 17 December 2021

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

I write in response to your email dated 8 December 2021 addressed to the Chair of this Inquiry, Professor Alexis Jay OBE. The Chair has asked me to respond to your email as corresponding with witnesses, core participants and stakeholders forms an important part of my role. She intends no discourtesy in doing so.

IICSA was established by the former Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP in March 2015, pursuant to section 1 of the Inquiries Act 2005. It has broad terms of reference tasking it with considering the extent to which all state and non-state institutions have failed to protect children from sexual abuse. Its remit is not limited in time, although it does have a geographical boundary, limited to institutions in England and Wales.

The Inquiry Panel adopted criteria for the selection of institutions and themes which would be the subject of its investigations in the early days of the Inquiry. It also conducted Research and has heard from 6000 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who have shared their experience through its Truth Project.

One of IICSA's investigations concerned Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings. This comprised a thematic inquiry into current child protection policies, practices and procedures in religious institutions that have a significant presence in England and Wales. The Inquiry held its public hearings for this investigation in 2020, where witnesses from several different religious groups gave evidence about their policies and procedures, as well as victims and survivors and victim groups. As part of this investigation, the Panel examined child protection

policies and practices relating to the UK Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Inquiry published its report in this investigation on 2 September 2021.

The question of whether it might be appropriate for the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry to extend its remit in the way sought by this petition, is a matter for it and the authorities in Scotland, not one on which IICSA can properly comment. However, I hope that this information about its terms of reference and CPIROS investigation is of assistance to you in considering this petition.