



MEDIA RELEASE – Thursday 23 August 2018

WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICES AUSTRALIA (WLSA) SAYS SPECIALISATION IN FAMILY LAW IS INTEGRAL TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S SAFETY IN THE FAMILY LAW COURT SYSTEM

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) has concerns about the impacts on safety from the proposed dismantling of the family law court for domestic violence victims and their children.

WLSA acknowledges there are longstanding issues and concerns about the Family Court's responsiveness to domestic violence cases and has advocated for years to change to this. However, the reality is that moves to a more generalist court could make matters much worse for domestic violence survivors in the family courts.

WLSA is also concerned about the proposed removal of family law appeals from the Family Court appeals division where they are currently heard to the generalist Federal Court.

Specialisation is fundamental for the safe resolution of the large number of family law matters involving domestic violence that proceed through the courts.

Angela Lynch, CEO of Women's Legal Service QLD and WLSA spokesperson said "We should be enhancing and building on current family law specialisation with increased and specialised responses to domestic violence and abuse in family law and not reducing it."

WLSA calls for legislative protection of specialisation in family law and for the establishment of a domestic violence court pathway in the family law system to better respond to risk and safety issues.

The need for specialist knowledge and skills in dealing with family law matters has already been recognised by the Federal Government in the recent parent management hearings bill currently before parliament, where decision makers in this new program are required to have expertise in these areas. At the same time the Federal Government appears to be reducing such specialisation in the court system.

We caution that any change to the family law court system must be supported by increased resources across the board and inclusive of women's legal services and other similar agencies, in order for it to be successful.

WLSA is concerned by the lack of a comprehensive consultation process that hears directly from victim-survivors to inform the proposed changes to the court system. The current ALRC Family Law Inquiry provides a unique opportunity for the family law system to be re-designed. To ensure that family law reform is not piecemeal and



Women's Legal Services Australia

is informed by the findings of the ALRC Inquiry we urge the Government to postpone any changes to the structure of the family law courts to after the ALRC Inquiry.

About WLSA

Women's Legal Services Australia is a national network of community legal centres specialising in women's legal issues. We are part of the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC).

The National Network was established to be actively involved in law reform activities to ensure that, particularly women and children, are not disadvantaged by laws and to lobby for improved access to justice.

The individual Member Centres regularly provide advice, information, casework and legal education to women on particularly family law and family violence matters but can also provide advice on more general legal issues.

More information about WLSA can be found here: http://www.wlsa.org.au/about_us

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