

OPEN LETTER

A CALL TO ALL POLITICAL LEADERS TO PUT SAFETY FIRST IN FAMILY LAW

4 May 2016

We are writing as a group of over 90 organizations that work with and advocate for the most disadvantaged in our community. We are family violence experts, legal experts, peak bodies and state and national alliances.

Every day, across Australia, family courts are failing women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Every day, family courts are failing to recognize and respond to the risk factors present in domestic violence cases - placing the most vulnerable children in the hands of abusive parents. Without specialist domestic violence expertise and support services at family courts to identify and assess risk, these children will continue to be placed in danger.

Every day, family courts are failing women who are victims of rape, physical violence and psychological abuse by allowing them to be directly cross-examined by their abuser. Despite calls for action on this issue over many years, no government has acted to legislate to stop direct cross-examination.

Every day, the impacts of domestic violence on women and children are overlooked or minimized by family law professionals. A recent Australian Institute of Family Studies report found that 30% of parties in the family law system were *never* asked about safety concerns or past history of domestic violence. It's time for all family law professionals to have comprehensive training and accreditation in domestic violence, cultural competency and working with victims of trauma.

Now is an opportunity for all political parties to commit to putting the safety of women and children first in family law.

A strong and effective family law system can be achieved with a real political commitment to implementing the reforms outlined in the Five Step Policy Platform that is attached. The platform provides a clear and practical pathway to safety for women and children.

We are not asking for another review. We are not asking for another inquiry. We are asking all political leaders to act now, to put safety first in family law.

Yours faithfully,

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