



Women's Legal Services Australia

MEDIA RELEASE – Thursday 7 December, 2017

Federal Government legislation putting the safety of women and children experiencing family violence at risk

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) calls on the Federal Attorney-General to prioritise the safety of women and children affected by domestic violence in proposed reforms to the family law system.

The Federal Attorney-General yesterday introduced in the Senate legislation aimed at significantly reforming the family law system. Under these proposed reforms, self-represented parents in Parramatta and one other location will be able to have their parenting disputes resolved through a pilot tribunal program known as "parenting management hearings".

Parents will need special permission to have a lawyer represent them at a hearing, and the hearings will deal with complex matters involving family violence and child abuse. Decisions made at the hearings will be binding on parents.

WLSA has concerns regarding how the planned changes may impact women and their children affected by domestic violence. WLSA Representative and CEO of Women's Legal Service Queensland, Angela Lynch says:

"We know at least 50% of matters that go before the family court involve domestic violence. In these cases there is an unequal power balance. When facing her abuser in this context a woman faces a disadvantage"

"A fundamental way that victims can be protected is by having lawyers advocating for them in hearings instead of having to deal directly with their abuser."

Ms Lynch acknowledges that with lengthy Family Court of Australia waiting periods, alternative ways of responding to these issues must be explored.

"We need to reform the family court system by putting the safety of women at the forefront of any reforms. We can see the bill goes some way to respond to the risks faced by women and children experiencing violence but also creates barriers to a fundamental protection – legal representation."

(ENDS)

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA)

Women's Legal Services Australia is a national network of community legal centres specialising in women's legal issues. 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.



Women's Legal Services Australia

Members include: Women's Legal Service Victoria, Women's Legal Service QLD, Women's Legal Service NSW, Women's Legal Service SA, Women's Legal Centre ACT, Women's Legal Service Tasmania, Women's Law Centre of WA, Regional Alliance West Inc, Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre, Central Australia Women's Legal Services, North Queensland Women's Legal Service, and associate members National Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service and Western NSW Community Legal Centre.

For further media information and interviews please contact:
Tania Clarke on 0430446739 or tania@womenslegal.org.au