



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release 15 June 2020

Domestic violence advocates welcome focus on safety of children in family law

Women's Legal Services Australia strongly supports the introduction of a bill today to remove the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility.

"The majority of matters in the family courts involve family violence," says Liz Snell, Law Reform and Policy Co-ordinator Women's Legal Service NSW and Women's Legal Services Australia spokesperson.

"For too long there has been a widespread misunderstanding within the community about the meaning of equal shared parental responsibility – many think it means equal time and so feel they have no option but to enter into arrangements based on this misbelief even though they may fear these arrangements are unsafe for their children and themselves. These agreements are often made without first seeking legal advice. We need provisions which instead of being presumptive, focus on decisions which are made on a case by case basis solely in the best interests of that child", says Ms Snell.

"The starting point in any decision about children must be their welfare and safety – not confusing legal presumptions. Removing the presumption will be a step towards debunking the dangerous 50:50 time myth," says Helen Matthews, Director – Legal & Policy, Women's Legal Service Victoria and WLSA spokesperson.

"The most comprehensive review of the *Family Law Act* in 40 years undertaken by the Australian Law Reform Commission last year recommended the removal of equal shared parental responsibility, as did the comprehensive parliamentary inquiry in 2017", says Janet Taylor, Managing Principal Solicitor, Central Australian Women's Legal Service and Women's Legal Services Australia spokesperson.

"We thank Graham Perrett, MP for standing with children and adult victim-survivors", says Angela Lynch, CEO Women's Legal Service Queensland and Women's Legal Services Australia spokesperson.

"Now is the time for action," says Ms Lynch. "The continued existence of equal shared parental responsibility is placing thousands of children at risk of further abuse", says Ms Lynch.

There is a petition calling for the end of equal shared parental responsibility available [here](#).

ENDS



Women's Legal Services Australia

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 Community Legal Centres Australia.

Media contacts:

Janet Taylor, Managing Principal Solicitor, Central Australian Women's Legal Service and Women's Legal Services Australia spokesperson **Ph: 08 8952 4055**

Angela Lynch: CEO, Women's Legal Service Qld and WLSA Spokesperson
Ph: 07 3392 0644

Helen Matthews, Director – Legal & Policy, Women's Legal Service Victoria and WLSA spokesperson **Ph: 03 8622 0600**

Liz Snell, Law Reform and Policy Co-ordinator, Women's Legal Service NSW and WLSA spokesperson **Ph: 02 8745 6900**