

## **24 March 2011 – Family law changes must go further**

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) welcomes the steps made in the Family Law Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011 but says the changes don't go far enough.

"More changes to family law are needed to protect the safety of women and children from violence," said Ms Dianne Hamey, Co-Convenor of WLSA. "Children's emotional and physical safety and the safety of other vulnerable family members should always be the first priority in family law."

The Bill, which is to be introduced into federal parliament today, proposes reforms that would prioritise safety when there is an inconsistency with a child having an ongoing meaningful relationship with another person. "Safe outcomes in families should be a clear and absolute priority and not subject to other considerations such as 'proving an inconsistency'," said Ms Hamey.

The amendments fail to remove the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility and the emphasis in the current Act on shared parenting. "The failure to touch these provisions means women and children who have experienced family violence will continue to be placed in danger," said Ms Hamey. "Parenting arrangements should be in the best interests of children, worked out on a case-by-case basis. Each family is unique and there shouldn't be presumptions about what is in any particular child's best interests."

"Families are too important to not take the time to judge each case on its own merits, especially when issues of family violence are involved."

"There are some positive changes included in the Bill, including a greater emphasis on safety, clearer definitions of child abuse and family violence, and removing legislative disincentives to women disclosing violence. However, these changes are really just tinkering at the edges of the Family Law Act," said Ms Hamey. "Fundamental reform of the Family Law Act is necessary so that children and other vulnerable family members can be protected from violence and abuse, after separation."

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