MEDIA RELEASE

Violent perpetrators allowed to cross-examine their victims in family law trials

Former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alistair Nicholson, has expressed serious concerns for victims of family violence who are being directly cross-examined by their abusive ex-partner in family law trials.

Victoria Legal Aid cuts in January of this year have led to increasing numbers of vulnerable people being unrepresented in family law trials. There are no specific protections in the Family Court to stop a perpetrator of violence directly cross-examining their victim at trial.

"For women who have been raped, assaulted and psychologically abused by their ex-partner, the trauma and distress of being questioned by the person who has harmed them so deeply is profound" said Pasanna Mutha, Policy & Campaigns Manager at Women's Legal Service Victoria.

"We share the former Chief Justice's concerns about the impact that Victoria Legal Aid cuts are having on victims of family violence in family law proceedings."

In Victoria, in sexual offence and family violence trials, specific laws are in place to stop an accused person from directly cross-examining their victim. An accused person must have legal representation to cross-examine at trial.

"These protections are working well to reduce further trauma for victims of violence" said Ms Mutha.

"We call on the Federal Attorney General to amend the *Family Law Act 1975* to protect family violence victims from being directly cross-examined in family law trials by the perpetrator of that violence."

"Our community expects that courts will protect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. This is a small step towards meeting those expectations."

Media contact: Pasanna Mutha, (03) 9642 0877

Follow us on Twitter @WomensLegalVic