

Wednesday, 20 May 2020

## Law Council President, Pauline Wright, statement on abject failure of domestic violence inquiry

The Law Council of Australia is appalled at the lack of commitment shown by the majority report of the bipartisan Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee in tackling domestic violence.

The release of the committee's majority report *Inquiry into domestic violence with particular regard to violence against women and their children* represents a sad failure of regard for the lives of those Australians lost to domestic violence, and those who will be in danger in the future.

The Law Council commends Senator Rex Patrick on the substance of his dissenting report and for calling out the failings of the committee in meeting its responsibilities, both as a committee of the Parliament and to the people of Australia.

The majority report was delivered three months ahead of schedule, without the committee accepting submissions or holding public hearings. As a result, the report amounts to little more than a literature review, posing a number of obvious and often stated questions. This demonstrates a lack of commitment by decision-makers to address a serious community problem and a significant cause of death in Australia.

The number of women in Australia who have died at the hands of a current or former partner persists without any significant reduction since 2010.

A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare noted that 1 in 6 women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15. One woman was killed every 9 days and one man every 29 days by a partner between 2014-15 and 2015-16.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed additional dangers for the victims of domestic violence, with a dramatic increase in demand for services. Eleven women have been killed in domestic violence incidents since lockdown was implemented in early March.

The Law Council has welcomed the government's announcement of \$20 million earmarked to support people affected by domestic violence as well the *Help is Here* campaign, and the rolling out of extra measures to ensure people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence know where to get help during the coronavirus pandemic.

But a valuable opportunity to examine and improve the programs that are working well to support and protect the vulnerable members of society, has been lost.

Chronic underfunding of the family law system by successive governments over many years, continues to leave vulnerable families in crisis.

ENDS

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