



Australian
Bar Association

MEDIA RELEASE

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PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY FAILS AUSTRALIANS AT RISK OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Australian Bar Association (**ABA**) expresses its disappointment at the decision by a Senate Committee investigating domestic violence to report three months ahead of schedule without conducting a single hearing, receiving one submission or consulting with experts or survivors of family violence.

The Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into domestic violence “with particular regard to violence against women and their children” was established in February 2020 and due to report by 13 August 2020. Its terms of reference included inquiring into the adequacy, effectiveness and resourcing of policies, programs, services and responses to domestic violence across government and immediate and long-term measures that need to be taken to prevent violence against women and their children.

President of the Australian Bar Association, Matthew Howard SC, said the Senate Committee’s decision was extremely disappointing and a missed opportunity to lead meaningful reform to protect children and families at risk.

“Domestic violence is a scourge in our community at any time, and its prevalence is known to increase during times of crisis and stress. Front line service providers continue to report increased instances of domestic violence and abuse during the 2019-20 bushfire season and now the COVID-19 pandemic. Now more than ever, there is a need for comprehensive analysis of the policies, services and programs that are working well and what we can do better as a nation to address this issue. The Senate Committee had the means and opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to developing policy in this space to protect Australians at risk,” Mr Howard said.

“Regrettably, the Committee has chosen not to take up that opportunity. The purpose of conducting hearings is to ensure relevant stakeholders are consulted, not for the sake of form or to “reinvent the wheel”, but to listen to the expertise of those who have experienced or work with the issues on a daily basis. That information should then be used to frame the issues and propose meaningful recommendations.

“There is only one mention of ‘family law support services’ in the Committee’s report. This ignores the Government’s responsibility to resource and properly fund service providers and the courts who are working with families who have experienced domestic violence. Delays due to chronic under-resourcing continue to adversely impact families and their children awaiting interim and final hearings.

“The establishment of the Committee in February 2020 was prescient and provided a valuable opportunity to hear from survivors of family violence, the community, the courts and key stakeholders on urgent and long overdue reform. The ABA echoes concerns raised by Centre Alliance in its [dissenting report](#). If the Australian Parliament does not take the issue of family violence seriously, what message does that send to survivors of family violence in our community?” said Mr Howard.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Greg Tolhurst: ceo@austbar.asn.au