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**PORTER'S FAMILY COURT MERGER HUMILIATION**

The Attorney-General has today suffered another rebuff to his ongoing plan to destroy the Family Court.

In a major embarrassment for Mr Porter, the Senate has effectively put a one year hold on his plans to effectively collapse the Family Court of Australia into its junior relation, the Federal Circuit Court, by setting a November 2020 date for a report into the legislation.

Mr Porter stunned many in the Family Court sector in May last year when he announced plans to destroy the Family Court on the basis of a 6 week desktop review by a firm of consultants. Earlier this year, a comprehensive report by the Australian Law Reform Commission – which the Government commissioned and is still to respond to – totally contradicted the Attorney-General by recommending the creation of an entirely new court system and greater specialisation in the family law system. The Morrison Government has not responded to that ALRC Report.

Instead Mr Porter reached agreement with One Nation to hold yet another inquiry into the family law system.

But in an extraordinary show of disrespect for both the new inquiry into the family law system this Government has created, and for the hundreds of Australians who are providing evidence to that inquiry, Mr Porter is not even waiting for that inquiry to commence before ploughing ahead with his radical and almost universally condemned Family Court merger plan.

The Family Court system is crucial to the well being of many thousands of Australians, especially young children. It is too important to be dealt with in such a chaotic and arrogant fashion by an Attorney-General with zero experience in family law but who still believes he knows better than those with decades of expertise.

Labor acknowledges there are significant problems with the current family law system, which have led to unacceptable delays for vulnerable families and – particularly – children.

There are many factors which have contributed to this current state of affairs. They include the Liberal Government's failure over the last six years to reappoint judges in a timely manner, ever-growing funding shortages in legal assistance services (which has increased the number of unrepresented litigants and, consequently, delays) and a number of inefficiencies in the family law system.

Rather than taking action to address these problems, the Morrison Government is plunging ahead with its reckless proposal to abolish the Family Court altogether.

The Morrison Government should abandon its proposal to abolish the Family Court and formally respond to the ALRC's 60 recommendations, many of which could be implemented quickly.

The Family Court of Australia was established by the Whitlam Government over four decades ago. Ensuring that the Family Court system works for Australian families is, and always has been, a priority for Labor.

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