

Friday, 22 May 2020

ADDRESSING FAMILY & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MORE VITAL THAN EVER

The Law Society of NSW believes the current debate about the release of the report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's Inquiry into domestic violence has highlighted the need to keep family and domestic violence firmly on the agenda of all governments – state, territory and Commonwealth.

After delivering its report three months ahead of its 13 August deadline, the "Inquiry into domestic violence with particular regard to violence against women and their children" has been criticised for failing to hold hearings, seek submissions or hear from witnesses.

President of the Law Society of NSW, Richard Harvey, said combatting domestic and family violence requires a complex and coordinated response that spans all jurisdictions and human service providers and focuses on the best interests of the victims of family and domestic violence.

"While the Senate Committee took the view that conducting another lengthy, broad-ranging public inquiry into domestic and family violence in Australia at this time would be of limited value, I do hope that the Committee has not missed an opportunity to highlight previously recommended immediate and long-term measures that will protect those vulnerable members of our community who are at risk from family and domestic violence," Mr Harvey said.

"When it comes to family and domestic violence, those working in the legal profession and other support services are all too familiar with the real, lasting and often tragic consequences of violence against women and children.

"We know that people experiencing domestic and family violence are many times more likely to experience a myriad of legal problems compared to the rest of the population – from family law issues through to employment, housing and debt problems and health issues as well.

"The social and economic impacts of the pandemic is now placing vulnerable women and children at increased risk.

"As the Law Council of Australia has highlighted this week, 11 women have been killed in domestic violence incidents since COVID-19 lockdown measures were put in place in March.

"For families in conflict, the risk of domestic violence is heightened by the additional stress factors of social isolation, job insecurity and financial strain.

"Where there is conflict over parenting arrangements, in many cases travel restrictions are adding fuel to the fire.

"The crisis is such that the Family Court and Federal Circuit Court have developed COVID-19 Lists to prioritise urgent pandemic-affected cases.

"Through these Lists, the courts have recognised an acute need to protect the safety of vulnerable parties, and we commend their initiative in doing so.

"What is clear, more so in the midst of the pandemic, is that we cannot afford to 'drop the ball' in relation to this issue.



“While I acknowledge and welcome the Federal Government’s \$150 million package to support Australians experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence due to the fallout from coronavirus, ensuring that appropriate support services are accessible and effective must remain firmly on the agenda of all governments – state, territory and Commonwealth.” Mr Harvey said.

“I look forward to engaging with any process or initiative designed to improve the legal system, or to alleviate the impact of the crisis, for domestic violence victims and their families.”

MEDIA CONTACT:

Sue Finn | Media and Public Relations Manager

The Law Society of New South Wales

T: +61 2 9926 0288 | M: +61 413 440 699 | E: media@lawsociety.com.au