

Monday, 23 September 2019

## Family violence awareness training urged for parliamentarians

The Law Council has condemned as dangerous suggestions by Senator Malcolm Roberts of One Nation that the family courts are contributing to family violence and called for family violence awareness training for all members of parliament.

“It is inappropriate to be blaming victims, the courts or judges for any person lashing out and hurting another person,” Law Council President, Arthur Moses SC, said today.

“Politicians must be careful not to use words that may incite those currently engaged in the system or dissatisfied with a court outcome to engage in violence.”

Mr Moses labelled as “irresponsible and plain stupid” comments by made One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts blaming the family law system for violence by men.

“These comments could incite violence against partners, children or judges of those courts, or provide excuses for some men to blame anyone else but themselves for hurting a partner or child. The comments of Senator Roberts will undermine, not assist, concerns being raised by some members of the community for law reform as to how custody matters can be dealt with in a less adversarial manner.”

“The Joint Select Committee Inquiry announced this week provides a critical opportunity for Parliament to examine holistic options to reform the system, including recent recommendations by the Australian Law Reform Commission. The Law Council has offered its support to the Inquiry but it needs to be free from bias and pre-determined outcomes.”

“But let me be clear – the Inquiry will have no hope of achieving any meaningful reform and will quickly lose support if it is overshadowed by these disgraceful comments or misguided by myths. Reform has to be based on facts not slogans.”

“This Inquiry must be about finding long-term solutions to a crippled family law system. This will assist vulnerable children, mothers, fathers, families and victims of family violence. Not apportioning blame or seeking to excuse the inexcusable.

“Cases of family violence are serious matters to be heard and determined by the courts and prosecuted by the police, not Parliament. If parties are unhappy with outcomes, these can decisions reviewed.

“I acknowledge Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and Attorney-General Porter have said earlier comments reported by Senator Hanson about the raising of domestic violence issues in family cases were wrong. The reported comments by the Senator were plainly wrong.”

“However, Prime Minister Morrison, Attorney-General Porter and Committee Chair Andrews now need to condemn these latest remarks by Senator Roberts in the strongest possible terms and ensure the Inquiry is conducted in a manner that is safe and respectful. Otherwise, the situation will quickly deteriorate and this Inquiry will harm not help children, mothers and fathers” Mr Moses said.

“The Law Council strongly recommends all parliamentarians including those who participate in this Inquiry be provided with family violence awareness training at the outset to help them undertake their important roles in the Inquiry but also considering any recommendations from the Inquiry.

# Media Release



“This training is important to assist them to better understand these issues, engage appropriately with stakeholders, and reach meaningful policy solutions.”

“There is also an urgent need for additional funding for legal assistance and family violence services to help those most vulnerable people in our community in their time of need.”

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