

Sunday, 31 May 2020

Statement on announcement of new inquiry into domestic violence from Law Council President, Pauline Wright

The Law Council is pleased to see that the government has announced a new inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, as the country continues to see a disturbing number of deaths due to violence in the home.

It is hoped that this inquiry will fulfil the charter that the recent Senate inquiry failed to deliver for the victims of domestic violence, when it closed three months ahead of schedule after having neither invited submissions nor held public hearings.

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.

With responses to the COVID-19 pandemic posing additional dangers for the victims of domestic violence, and a dramatic increase in demand for services being reported with 12 women losing their lives at the hands of their domestic partners since early March, this inquiry by House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs', will return Parliament's attention to the urgent need to address the devastating impact of family, domestic and sexual violence.

The Law Council believes that examining the coordination between Commonwealth, state and territory agencies as well as business and the community, is critical in addressing systemic failures in the system for Australian families.

The Law Council calls on the inquiry to address issues within the justice system including the chronic underfunding of the family law system by successive governments over many years and for Commonwealth, state and territory governments to ensure stable and adequate funding of legal assistance services for victims and perpetrators of family violence.

The Law Council looks forward to engaging with the Committee and the Australian Parliament on this important inquiry.

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