

May 20, 2020

## **SENATE INQUIRY WAS MISSED OPPORTUNITY**

Central Victoria's leading specialist domestic and family violence response service says a senate committee tasked with examining domestic violence in Australia has missed an opportunity to address how governments can best support, contribute to and drive the social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children, as set out in the terms of reference.

The Senate referred an inquiry into domestic violence with particular regard to violence against women and their children to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee in February, following the deaths of Brisbane mother Hannah Clarke and her children Aaliyah, Laianah and Trey, in February.

The committee was given six months to examine the issue, but this week delivered the report three months ahead of schedule - without input from the specialist domestic and family violence sector.

The committee was tasked with inquiring into and reporting on domestic violence with particular regard to violence against women and their children, including:

- (a) the status of, and any barriers in implementing, the recommendations of the reports;
- (b) the adequacy, effectiveness and resourcing of policies, programs, services and responses to domestic violence across the Australian Government, state and territory governments, local governments, nongovernment and community organisations, business and the media;
- (c) immediate and long-term measures that need to be taken to prevent violence against women and their children;
- (d) the effects of policy decisions regarding housing, legal services, and women's economic independence limiting the ability of women and children to escape domestic violence;
- (e) how the Australian Government and state and territory governments can best support, contribute to and drive the social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children; and

Centre for Non-Violence chief executive officer Margaret Augerinos says the report fails to address the terms of reference and is a missed opportunity to 'really get to the heart of how we start to address the drivers of domestic violence and gender inequality'.

“This report has not progressed the conversation about violence against women and children in any way,” she said.

“It doesn’t add anything new to our understanding of the drivers of family violence, how to prevent it, or even make any recommendations about how we need to move forward into the future.

“There is no advice around what government and community need to do, to address the social and cultural behaviours required to eliminate violence against women or children.

“It does not address any of the systemic failures, or the reasons that resulted in the death of Hannah and her children.

“The committee has not explored the court systems, community and social response, the ‘good bloke’ narrative - this was a chance to ask ‘what failed here, what could have been different?’”.

Ms Augerinos is disappointed the voices of women and children with lived experience were not heard, and the sector was not invited to make submissions.

“It was an opportunity to explore at systemic level the voices of women and children with lived experience,” she said.

“It was also an opportunity to listen to advocates, and how working to prevent family violence can be informed through that lens.

“Specialist women’s services and peaks across the country have very clear views about what and how change needs to happen, and for that not to have been included is a missed opportunity.”

CNV encourages the COAG Women’s Safety Council to focus on the following urgent actions and longer term reforms identified by Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA), in March:

1. Fully fund the specialist services women and children rely on to be safe.
2. Put kids’ safety first in the family law system.
3. Ensure women and children facing major safety risks can be identified and referred correctly by frontline workers in health, social, family and community services.
4. Improve AVO standards so that women and children can rely upon them for their safety, and perpetrators are held accountable for ongoing patterns of violence and abuse.
5. Ensure everyone’s calls for help can be heard.