



Feminist Legal Clinic Inc.

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Committee Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts & Audit
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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By email: jcpaa@aph.gov.au
Submitted on-line

Dear Madam/Sir

Efficiency and Effectiveness
Inquiry into the Auditor-General's Report No 45 (2018-2019)
Coordination and Targeting of Domestic Violence Funding and Actions

Feminist Legal Clinic Inc. (FLC) is a community legal service that works to advance the human rights of women and girls through a combination of targeted casework, community legal education and law reform work. Our entirely volunteer staff work to support many women's groups, campaigns and services as well as individual women attempting to escape male violence, control and exploitation.

It is clear from the Summary and Recommendations of the Auditor-General's Report No 45 that the coordination and targeting of domestic violence funding and actions has been neither efficient nor effective. Most obviously the controversies and revelations in relation to the management of White Ribbon and its ultimate closure demonstrate the extent to which domestic violence funding has been misdirected.

Despite the understandable desire to have men play a part as role models in the prevention of domestic violence, the male ambassador approach is clearly flawed. Of significant concern, is the use of these positions by male perpetrators of violence as a platform to further their own interests while taunting their victims. Meanwhile oppressive defamation laws make it almost impossible to have this behaviour exposed.

We are deeply concerned that domestic violence funding is not being directed to autonomous women's organisations guided by a feminist framework, but to agencies ultimately controlled by, or answerable to, those with an interest in undermining the

progress made by the women's liberation movement. Our experience of women's support services generally is that unless they are run by women with a deep commitment to women's liberation, their effectiveness is easily compromised by the need to please male overlords. There is a disturbing emphasis in many organisations on satisfying stakeholders whose interests do not always align with the liberation of women from male violence, control and exploitation.

Within NSW we have seen in recent years the widespread dismantling of the women's refuges by putting them up for tender, with many services originally established through the unpaid efforts of feminist women, now managed and operated by large religious agencies and often operating as general homelessness services. Centralised call centres, often answered by male operators, have taken the place of referral to the local women's refuge where they would receive personalised support from a woman experienced in the dynamics of domestic violence and guided by a feminist perspective. Many specialist trained staff and children's programs have been lost and women and children are increasingly offered temporary accommodation in a motel or together with individuals rendered homeless due to mental health and substance abuse issues.

Since the end of July 2019 our service has also stepped in to continue the operation of a domestic violence support service operating out the Sydney Family Court after the NSW Government discontinued its funding. The Women's Family Law Court Support Service (WFLCSS) was originally established over 10 years ago as a joint project of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement (now dismantled) and the Sydney Family Court. Evaluations of the service indicated that it should be expanded into every Family Court. Although the NSW Government claims that the new Family Advocacy Support Service (FASS) provided by Legal Aid provides adequate support, this is not the experience reported to us by our clients.

We are also aware that the NSW Women's Domestic Violence Court Support Service (WDVCAS) is also once again being put up for tender and increasingly being required to work in close collaboration with police and other government agencies in a manner that compromises their autonomy and ability to advocate on behalf of women's interests.

From these examples, you can see that the dismantling of autonomous women's services is continuing at pace. This is even though it is these feminist services first established by the women's liberation movement in the 1970s and 1980s that have proven to be most effective in combatting domestic violence. It is essential that the Federal government observes its international human rights obligations and redirects domestic violence funding to restoring and preserving what is left of services established by the women's movement and ensuring they operate free of patriarchal constraints.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We are happy to be contacted to expand on any element of it if required.

Yours faithfully



Anna Kerr
Principal Solicitor