

24 August 2022

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Fair Work Amendment (Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave) Bill 2022 – response to question on notice

Relationships Australia thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide evidence on Monday, 22 August 2022.

During the hearing, we took on notice a question from Senator O’Sullivan with respect to the experience of our clients in seeking and obtaining from their employers the currently available unpaid leave for family and domestic violence. We note that Senator O’Sullivan was particularly interested in the experiences of victim-survivors in disclosing their experiences to employers, and how this may have impacted take up of the leave entitlement.

In responding to this question, we note that we do not hold data in relation to the individual experiences of Relationships Australia clients in accessing their leave entitlements through employers. However, we draw to the Committee’s attention the information provided in our submission that demonstrates the range of co-morbidities impacting our clients who are experiencing family violence. These can include:

- poverty and financial stress
- employment precarity
- housing stress and homelessness
- poor mental health, and
- misuse of substances.¹

It is our experience that clients require a range of services and supports to assist them to navigate these co-morbidities, and that, often, resolving these issues is a precursor to achieving enduring change in their relationships.

¹ See also Family Law Council, *Families with Complex Needs and the Intersection of the Family Law and Child Protection Systems – Interim Report* (2015); submission of Relationships Australia South Australia in response to Australian Law Reform Commission Issues Paper 48 on Australia’s family law system (submission 62), 4.

In light of this, we echo and support the evidence provided by other witnesses during the hearing on 22 August 2022, that ensuring a clear and simple pathway to obtaining leave entitlements will be critical to ensuring this Bill achieves its stated objectives.

It is crucial that employers and HR practitioners are trained to understand the significant impacts of family violence and are able to respond to requests by their employees in a trauma informed manner.

In our evidence before the Committee, we noted the importance of breaking down stigma and shame as a precursor to enabling disclosure. We believe that the Bill will create a safe space in which disclosure is normalised as part of the employment relationship, and as such, is less stigmatising.

We agree with the Senator's suggestion that this Bill, by itself, will not act as a panacea to the multitude of issues facing victim-survivors of family violence. However, if accompanied by awareness-raising and support for both employees and employers, we consider it will be an important component of the ongoing efforts to eradicate family and domestic violence in Australia, and support those against whom it is perpetrated.

If the Committee would like to discuss this issue, or any of the other matters raised in our submission, further, please contact

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate, and kind regards,

Nick Tebbey
National Executive Officer