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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Private Submission

Inquiry into domestic violence with particular regard to violence against women and their children

Domestic violence victims need support during their ordeals. This includes access to paid time-off to deal with associated events and imposts. That process should be provided for and managed by the government.

Domestic violence leave should be funded by government so the privacy of victims can be protected.

It has been shown time and time again that the victims of domestic violence want privacy during their difficulty. Very few victims want their private lives to become the business of their employer.

Any funded domestic violence leave should be provided by Centrelink after recommendation by the experts in the community. Recommendations made by qualified welfare workers and those expert staff in women's centres and other support agencies across the nation.

The domestic violence Safer Pathway program is the obvious place from which to provide leave - it is a well thought out comprehensive program of support. To provide leave through another mechanism would undermine that program.

To force victims, who are desperate for time off, to go to another place, their employer, and explain their life situation all over again will create extra stress for the victim. Victims do not want more complexity in their lives.

Those who designed the system involving employers, are placing extra stress on a victim. Isn't it better that they go to the experts who would help manage that stress - because experts are trained to do that?

We see arguments from some academics and others that employers shouldn't worry as there is such a small take up of DVL that the costs, to employers, will be minimal. These people use various reports to justify their opinions.

The argument about the cost to employer I will leave to others. I am more interested in the cost on the victim, the emotional and time cost.

As [reported](#) in The Guardian in 2015 the take up of DVL in the larger workplaces where it is made available is very low indeed – less than half of one percent.

Another report by the Australia Institute's [Centre for Future Work](#) in 2016, reports that less than 1.5% of female employees and around 0.3% of male employees are likely to use DVL. The same report states that only 0.001% of Telstra's 32,000-person workforce has used DVL in two years.

Similar figures were quoted again this year where less than 0.3% of public servants in Victoria accessed DVL.

The research is used to, as mentioned above, show that there is no serious financial impact on employers. That is a false finding. We should be asking why the schemes are not utilised. Are the researchers saying that domestic violence is not as big an issue as we have been led to believe? Is it something confronting less than 0.3% of the population? As awful as that is for the 0.3%.

The Human Rights Commission states that *"Almost two-thirds of women affected by domestic and family violence in Australia are in some form of paid employment."*

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states on its website *"According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Personal Safety Survey, 2.2 million Australians have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner and 3.6 million Australians have experienced emotional abuse from a partner."*

So, who is right? Are victims not accessing the leave provisions as they are very reluctant to disclose their situation in the workplace or is the problem not as big as stated?

The reality is that domestic violence is a private issue and now the government wants it to become known in the workplace.

The government and others will demand that victims will do as the government tells them if they want leave.

If the victims want privacy then the government doesn't want to know about them and doesn't care for them.

Surely, any process of support must take into account the emotional needs of the victims as well as their need for paid time off to address very real, and often dangerous, situations.

A nationally provided system of DVL, the same as we have for Paid Parental Leave (PPL), is sensible and reflects the fact that this is a societal issue, not a problem that is created by employers.

We should also not create greater complexity for victims from domestic violence. That makes the problem worse not better, embedding DVL in the workplace doesn't address the actual problem.

A government funded DVL lets victims maintain their privacy for a situation that many do not wish to share with those in the workplace, no matter how well meaning and supportive those people are and can be.

If DVL is managed by the welfare sector, there is a greater chance of getting victims to go where there is privacy and professional support.

The real situations in the real world are being ignored. Smaller location-based communities and social and ethnic wider communities can be very close and workplaces are part of their networks. Do we really want the victim to swallow their pride and disclose their situation to their employer when the alleged perpetrator maybe nearby or in that employment network either in fact or vicariously?

My experience with these situations is that the victim will wherever possible seek support from places that are not associated with their networks or locations.

We should consider the emotional and real needs of victims. That means keeping it out of the workplace and leaving it with those that know how to provide support – the community experts.

Yours sincerely

Peter Strong
An advocate for community