



Women's Legal Services Australia

MEDIA RELEASE – ELECTION 2016

GREENS ENDORSES 5 STEP PLAN TO KEEP WOMEN AND CHILDREN SAFE IN FAMILY LAW

Women's Legal Services Australia's (WLSA) today welcomes the Australian Greens domestic violence policy and \$60 million funding commitment announced on 26 May 2016.

The Greens have become the first political party to commit to WLSA's *Safety First in Family Law* plan.

Together with Rosie Batty, WLSA are calling for reform to create a system that keeps women and children safe. The *Safety First in Family Law* plan was supported by over 90 organisations and family violence groups in an open letter to the federal leaders on 4 May 2016 [letter below].

The Greens support the 5-step *Safety First in Family Law* plan in its entirety. The Greens will put safety first in family law with a \$60 million package involving the following reforms:

- National roll out of a Coordinated Family Dispute Resolution pilot which incorporated specialist domestic violence lawyers and social workers into the Family Court system.
- Reform to the Family Law Act including amendments requiring Courts to consider family violence when determining a property division and legal protections that stop victims from being directly cross-examined by their abuser.
- Establishing a national accreditation and monitoring scheme for all family report writers; with mandatory training on domestic violence, cultural competency and working with victims of trauma.

"The Greens election announcement is welcome news. WLSA now calls on the other major political parties to recognise the need for urgent reform in the family law system and commit to the *Safety in Family Law* five step plan." said Emma Smallwood, acting National Law Reform Coordinator, WLSA.

"We need to support victims all the way through the process of separating from their abuser and this includes through the family law system." said Ms Smallwood

Media contacts:

Emma Smallwood, Women's Legal Service Australia (03) 8622 0600
Anna Barnes, Women's Legal Service Victoria, 0422 609 224

Visit our campaign website: <https://safetyinfamilylaw.org.au/thesolutions/>

OPEN LETTER A CALL TO ALL POLITICAL LEADERS TO PUT SAFETY FIRST IN FAMILY LAW

4 May 2016

Dear Prime Minister Turnbull,

We are writing as a group of over 90 organizations that work with and advocate for the most disadvantaged in our community. We are family violence experts, legal experts, peak bodies and state and national alliances.

Every day, across Australia, family courts are failing women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Every day, family courts are failing to recognize and respond to the risk factors present in domestic violence cases - placing the most vulnerable children in the hands of abusive parents. Without specialist domestic violence expertise and support services at family courts to identify and assess risk, these children will continue to be placed in danger.

Every day, family courts are failing women who are victims of rape, physical violence and psychological abuse by allowing them to be directly cross-examined by their abuser. Despite calls for action on this issue over many years, no government has acted to legislate to stop direct cross-examination.

Every day, the impacts of domestic violence on women and children are overlooked or minimized by family law professionals. A recent Australian Institute of Family Studies report found that 30% of parties in the family law system were *never* asked about safety concerns or past history of domestic violence. It's time for all family law professionals to have comprehensive training and accreditation in domestic violence, cultural competency and working with victims of trauma.

Now is an opportunity for all political parties to commit to putting the safety of women and children first in family law.

A strong and effective family law system can be achieved with a real political commitment to implementing the reforms outlined in the Five Step Policy Platform that is attached. The platform provides a clear and practical pathway to safety for women and children.

We are not asking for another review. We are not asking for another inquiry. We are asking all political leaders to act now, to put safety first in family law.

Yours faithfully,

Pasanna Mutha-Merrenge
National Law Reform Coordinator
Women's Legal Services Australia

Jacqui Watt
Chief Executive Officer
No To Violence & Men's Referral Service

Gulnara Abbasova
Director
**Federation of Ethnic Communities'
Councils of Australia**

Antoinette Braybrook
National Convenor
**National Family Violence Prevention Legal
Services Forum**

Jacqueline Phillips
Director of Policy
Australian Council of Social Service

Julia Hall
CEO
**National Association of Community Legal
Centres**

Karen Willis
Executive Officer
**Rape & Domestic Violence Services
Australia**

Caroline Lambert
Executive Officer
YWCA Australia

Kelly Banister
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Women's Health Network

James Farrell OAM
Director
**Queensland Association of Independent
Legal Services Inc.**

Cate Edwards
Joint Acting Executive Officer
**Federation of Community Legal Centres
(Victoria) Inc**

Michelle O'Flynn
Director
Queensland Advocacy Incorporated

Terese Edwards
Chief Executive Officer
**National Council of Single Mothers & their
Children**

Maya Avdibegovic
CEO
**InTouch, Multicultural Centre Against
Family Violence**

Fiona McLeay
CEO
Justice Connect

Lindy Edwards
Co-ordinator
Sera's Women's Shelter Inc.

Robyn Roberts
General Manager
Crossroads Network - The Salvation Army

Jane Brock
Executive Officer
**Immigration Women's Speakout
Association of NSW**

Alastair McEwin
Executive Director
Community Legal Centres NSW Inc.

Nassim Arrage
Principal Solicitor
Central Coast Community Legal Centre

Jen Hargrave
Policy Officer -violence against women with
disabilities
Women With Disabilities Victoria

Emily Maguire
Chief Executive Officer
**Domestic Violence Resource Centre
Victoria (DVRCV)**

Rachael Bausor
CEO
WIRE Women's Information

Julie Oberin
National Chair
WESNET

Betty Green
Co-convener
WEAVE

Diane Mangan
CEO
DV Connect

Jillian Heeley
Principal Solicitor
Far West Community Legal Centre

Helen Campbell
Executive Officer
Women's Legal Service NSW

Leeanne Robertson
Corporate Manager
Geraldton Resource Centre

Cathy Crawford
Coordinator
The women's centre
North Queensland Combined Women's Services Inc

Zana Bytheway
Executive Director
Job Watch Inc

Ariel Couchman
Director
Youthlaw

Peter Noble
Executive Officer
Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre

Kerry Burns
CEO
Centre Against Violence

Vera Hardiman
Principal Lawyer/ Coordinator
Casey Cardinia Community Legal Service Inc

Chris Howse
Principal Solicitor
Whittlesea Community Legal Service

Kate Windmill
Principal Lawyer
Gippsland Community Legal Service

Katrina Ironside
Director
IARC Immigration Advice & Rights Centre

Joanna Fletcher
Chief Executive Officer
Women's Legal Service Victoria

Lisa-Maree Stevens
Director - Community Services
Mallee Family Care & Manager
Murray Mallee Community Legal Service

Libby Stewart
Director
Kimberley Community Legal Services Inc.

Eleesa Johnstone
President
Nundah Community Support Group Inc.

Maree Hawken
Coordinator, Queensland Women's Health Network & Secretariat
Women's Health Services Alliance Queensland

Cathie Nederveen
Coordinator
Mitcham Family Violence Education and Support Service

Anthony Kelly
Executive Officer
Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre

Hugh de Kretser
Executive Director.
Human Rights Law Centre

Helen Bolton
Chief Executive Officer
Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault

Rosslyn Monro
CEO
Women's Legal Service (Qld)

Glen Ludbrook
Principal Lawyer
Central Highlands Community Legal Centre

Robyn Cotterell-Jones OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Victims Support Unit
Victims of Crime Assistance League (VOCAL) Inc NSW

Carolyn Worth
Chair
Southern Melbourne Integrated Family Violence Partnership

Renata Field
Director
Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services NSW Inc.

Kristine McConnell
Manager
Orana House

Samantha Bettenay
Acting Principal Solicitor
Bunbury Community Legal Centre

Kedy Kristal
Chief Executive Officer
Patricia Giles Centre

Jeanette Large
CEO
Women's Property Initiatives

Jenny Jackson
Chief Executive Officer
Eastern Domestic Violence Service

Lesley Kirkwood
Managing Solicitor on behalf of Djinda Services & Managing Solicitor
Women's Law Centre of WA

Heidi Guldbaek
Coordinator
Domestic Violence Legal Workers Network (WA)

Helga Biro
Executive Director
Centacare Cairns

Gai Walker
Managing Director
SCALES Community Legal Centre

Diann Rodgers-Healey (PhD)
Director
Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (ACLW) Pty Ltd

Aloma Fennell
National President
The Older Women's Network Australia Inc.

Silvie Calder-Hickey
Manager
Sydney City Family Relationship Centre

Jude Marshall
Secretary
Queensland Domestic Violence Services Network

Anna Cody
Associate Professor and Director,
Kingsford Legal Centre
Faculty of Law, The University of New South Wales

Associate Professor Mark Brough
Acting Head of Discipline (Social Work and
Human Services) School of Public Health and
Social Work at QUT
- on behalf of Academic and Professional Staff
in the School of Social Work, QUT

Vicki Johnston
**Co-Chair of the Eastern Suburbs Domestic
Violence Network**

Pauline van Adrichem
Principal Solicitor
Women's Legal Service Tasmania

Sienna Aguilar
NSW Member
**Young Women's Advisory Group of the
Equality Rights Alliance**

Marie Coleman
National Foundation for Australian Women

Vicki Johnston
Manager
The Deli Women & Children's Centre

Michael Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Vikki Batcheler
Manager
Hedland Women's Refuge

Sharyn Potts
Executive Officer
Yarredi Services

Rosemary Larkin
Manager
**Macleod Accommodation Support Service
(MASS) Inc**

Carmen Hannaker- Green
UAW-ERA representative

Rob Andrew
Clinical Manager
Domestic Violence Services
Relationships Australia (Western Australia)

Louellyn Gane
Principal Solicitor
Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre

Debra Malthouse
Chief Executive Officer
Wuchopperen Health Services Ltd

Hayley Grainger
Principal Solicitor
North Queensland Women's Legal Service

Michael Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Eastern CLC

Nick Hudson
Executive Officer
Barwon Community Legal Centre

Anna Jones
Program Manager
Carinity Communities, Talera

Ellysha Melville
Domestic Violence Outreach Worker
Pilbara Community Legal Service Inc.

Charles Pragnell
Executive Chairman
**National Child Protection Alliance of
Australia**

Justine Clarke
General Manager
**Midland Information Debt and Legal
Advocacy Service Inc.**

Julie Stewart
CEO

Union of Australian Women

Sharon Large
Chief Executive Officer
Shelter Housing Action Cairns

The collective
**Women's House Shelta
Brisbane**

Denis Nelthorpe
Executive Director
WEstjustice

**Manly Warringah Women's Resource
Centre**

**Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence
Services South Australia**

Joanna Hayter
Chief Executive Officer
**International Women's Development
Agency**

Jackie Galloway
Chief Executive Officer
Peninsula Community Legal Centre Inc