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**Submission to the Coroners (Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board) Amendment Bill 2015 and the Queensland Criminal Law (Domestic Violence) Amendment Bill 2015**

We welcome the significant investment foreshadowed in the proposed legislative reforms with the goal of improving the safety of women and children in domestic and family violence situations.

We note at the outset that there appears to be a difference in the terminology describing the scope of domestic violence death review processes with the denoting of a “Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board” as compared with the *Domestic Violence Death Review Team*. Language and definitions are important in this critical sphere. Specifically where “domestic and family” violence are referred to at the same time this increases the scope of the types of deaths that may be investigated. Family violence usually incorporates child abuse and neglect as well as intimate partner violence whereas “domestic violence” usually refers to ‘intimate partner’ violence. Clarification of use of terms will assist with explaining the intended scope of the review process.

**1. Coroners (Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board)**

Within the tight timeframe allocated to develop a response to the proposed legislative reforms, it has not been possible to provide more than a brief summary. I attach for your interest a report which was furnished to the Domestic Violence Death Review Unit which provides an overview of the role of domestic violence fatality review “boards” or “committees” as they are sometimes known. In drawing from this report the following points are made:

- The legislative framework for the proposed Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board appears to cover well the key issues of access to information, confidentiality, liability and immunity. This stands to ensure that critical information is made available and also that participants in the process are able to freely contribute their views and experience.
- There appears to be the recommendation of enhanced capacity of the Domestic Violence Death Review Unit to provide the Review and Advisory Board with adequate research expertise and capability to respond to informing particular cases or comparisons between cases. This is welcomed.
- Best practice suggests a close collaboration between social science and legal science in order to maximise the learning from particular cases and across cases. We recommend that the Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Unit considers how it may build on existing research capacity, history and knowledge in Queensland in order to maximise its research capability.

- It is not clear how the learning from the analysis of systemic issues in relation to domestic violence deaths will contribute to real policy and practice change. The specific make-up of the Board is likely to determine the extent to which key decision-makers in relevant sectors may be influenced by review findings. The Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research as a dual model centre that focuses on implications of research for practice offers a conduit by which research may be disseminated to the raft of domestic and family violence services throughout the state.
- It is not clear at this stage as to how the implications of the findings from death reviews will be fed into an evaluation framework which identifies significant gaps in data collection and evaluation of particular initiatives and interventions. In other words, findings may indicate both that further investigation of a particular system is warranted or that a particular intervention appears to be working well. In both cases there needs to be a link with a research framework that ensures that the Domestic Violence Death Review Unit findings contribute to research, policy and practice and that the Unit is able to proactively and effectively promote the need for further research and investigation.

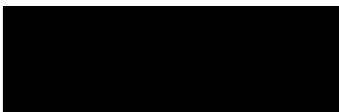
## **2. Criminal Law (Domestic Violence) Amendment Act Bill 2015**

We consider the proposed legislative amendments support the laudable aims of increasing safety of victims of domestic violence and increasing deterrence measures for perpetrators of domestic violence.

Our overall response however is that such measures need to be regularly evaluated and reviewed in order to measure effectiveness and unintended consequences. An evaluation framework, as suggested above, would provide an overarching mechanism by which initiatives may be reviewed with a planned approach and offer a conduit whereby policy and practice may be enhanced.

It is recognised in the ‘Not Now Not Ever’ report that in order to respond to domestic violence a whole of government and whole of community approach is needed. Legislative reform is one part of a much larger set of systems that respond to domestic violence and is not clear as to how these initiatives in the legislative domain link with and interact with the wider justice, health and social domains.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Associate Professor Annabel Taylor.

Associate Professor Annabel Taylor  
Director