



24th September 2015

BoysTown

Communities, Disability Services
and Domestic Violence and Family
Violence Prevention Committee

Fresh start.
New hope.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Bills being considered in implementing recommendations of the report of the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, *"Not now, not ever: putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland"*.

BoysTown works in a number of locations across QLD, in face to face services with young people, children, parents and carers, as well as through virtual services through Parentline and Kids Helpline. Domestic and Family Violence presents across all our service domains and requires a serious effort to address, from early signs through to the devastating tragedies we are more commonly witnessing in our QLD communities. The organisation welcomes the Government's commitment in implementing the recommendations of the Special Taskforce.

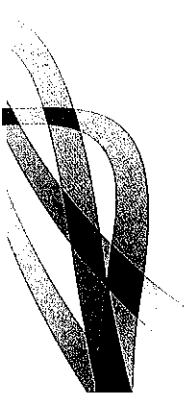
The comments below reflect our services perspective, particularly the experience drawn from our Family and Domestic Violence Refuge Service in responding to women and children.

The Coroners (Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board) Amendment Bill 2015:

This Bill responds to the need long identified across the Family and Domestic Violence sector and now reiterated through and by the Task force.

We support a systemic review mechanism that can further inform all future responses to violence by improving them and hopefully reduce the numbers of deaths related to Family and Domestic Violence. Across all community and government agencies there are significant variances in how individuals and families are responded to when violence is impacting. The general community has an expectation that a call for assistance will be responded to with an informed approach, however there are ongoing biases, lack of training, lack of standards, resource constraints, policy constraints and personal barriers that need to be identified in order for a change to create a safer community. Informing all systems and services of gaps, really identifying missed opportunities to protect vulnerable people, can only improve future safety of Queenslanders.

Further, the organisation supports the proactive exchange of information required to support the work of the Board. The limits of confidentiality are differently understood across agencies, and siloed policies that ignore safety need to be considered in the systemic analysis.



The Criminal Law (Domestic Violence) Amendment Bill 2015:

1. increasing the maximum penalty for breaches of domestic violence orders under the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* (Taskforce Recommendation 121),
2. enabling charges from criminal offences to indicate whether they occurred in a domestic violence context and providing for convictions for domestic violence offences to be noted on a person's criminal history (Taskforce Recommendation 119), and
3. amending the *Evidence Act 1977* to provide that protections for special witnesses may apply to victims of domestic violence (Taskforce Recommendation 133).

In relation to these proposed amendments:

1. Current provisions exist to hold those responsible for perpetrating violence against family members accountable. There is a real question of the value of increasing penalties when these are not now imposed, or inconsistently imposed. Many instances of reported breaches are ignored and family members have little faith in the police and courts responding to their safety concerns. Systemic issues impacting also include a lack of legal services to assist those who experience violence.
Is there any consideration for a set of minimum penalties in addition to maximum penalties?
2. Retrospectively recording violent behaviours through recording of criminal offences that identify a pattern of behaviour contributes to a systematic approach in addressing safety concerns. This is welcomed as a measure to potentially increase earlier identification of escalating violent behaviours.
3. Removing the need to meet current criteria to be eligible as a special witness is welcomed. Women are often facing court when most vulnerable and at times without any agency or legal support. However, court infrastructure varies across locations. Technology is limited in many locations and there is a concern that in all areas, but particularly in regional and rural communities, facilities are especially limited in providing protections for special witnesses.

BoysTown had the opportunity to also contribute to the Taskforce report, and again is welcoming of the responsiveness of the QLD Government to the issues impacting vulnerable community members.

Sincerely



Elisabeth Kobierski
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