

## Queensland Community Safety Bill 2024

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## INQUIRY INTO THE QUEENSLAND COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL 2024 SUBMISSION FROM SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF BRISBANE INC

### For attention:

Committee Secretary, Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee  
Parliament House, George Street, Brisbane Qld 4000

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## OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

- **Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc** takes this significant opportunity to provide this submission to the **Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee on the Inquiry in to the Queensland Community Safety Bill 2024**.
- Our membership base consists of business, community, and professional women who advocate for all women and girls. As part of the global advocacy organisation, Soroptimist International, our network of around 66,000 members in 118 countries works at local, national, and international levels to **educate, empower and enable** opportunities for all women and girls. Over a century ago Soroptimist International (SI) established a women's organisation that proliferated throughout the globe. Our purpose is similar to **Sustainable Development Goal SDG5 for gender equality**.
- Soroptimist International is committed to end all forms of violence which affect women and girls disproportionately. Gender-based violence occurs in the family, in the general community, and through actions perpetrated or condoned by the State. Whatever form it takes, gender-based violence is deeply rooted in historical inequalities, power imbalances, and gender-based discrimination. Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights and affects the ability of all women and girls to reach their full potential and participate in society.

- As well, Soroptimist International continues to call attention to the fact that, despite reports dating back two decades calling for reform, gender-based discrimination in the criminal justice system continues to disproportionately affect all women and girls. This discrimination creates significant obstacles to achieving access to quality justice for all women and girls, whether they are victims, witnesses, alleged offenders or prisoners.
- As an organisation deeply committed to the protection and empowerment of all women and girls in our community, we advocate for legislative reforms that safeguard their rights and ensure their safety. Our stance aligns with key international human rights instruments such as the UN Charter for Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), allied conventions and treaties, as well as relevant Australian and Queensland policies and legislation.

## OUR POSITION

In response to the proposed legislative measures concerning criminal justice, public safety, and youth welfare, we emphasise the following key points:

1. **Presence at Children's Court Proceedings:** While transparency in judicial proceedings is vital, it must be balanced with the need to protect the privacy and dignity of all women and girls, particularly in sensitive cases such as domestic violence or sexual assault. We urge policymakers to ensure that any measures allowing certain persons and the media to be present at Children's Court proceedings respect the rights and safety of all women and girls, in line with Australian and Queensland human rights and privacy legislation.
2. **Handheld Scanner Trials:** We support initiatives to enhance public safety, including handheld scanner trials, we stress the importance of safeguarding privacy and rights. The use of such technologies should be in accordance with privacy laws such as the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) at the federal level and the Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld) in Queensland.
3. **Firearms Prohibition Order Scheme and Ammunition Verification:** We acknowledge the need to strengthen regulations related to firearms and ammunition which is crucial for preventing gender-based violence. We note that the Queensland Weapons Act 1990 regulates the possession and use of firearms and ammunition, with provisions for prohibiting access to firearms by individuals with a history of violence against women.
4. **Reform of Weapons Act 1990:** We endorse reforms to the 'fit and proper person' test in the Weapons Act 1990 which is essential to deterring perpetrators of violence. This should include amendments to capture a broader range of serious offences and impose stricter penalties for violations, aligning with Queensland's commitment to gender equality and non-discrimination.
5. **Penalties for Possessing Weapons:** We support provisions to increasing penalties for possessing weapons in public places which is crucial to deterring potential offenders. We acknowledge that the

Queensland Criminal Code Act 1995 includes provisions regarding possession of weapons in public places, with penalties for offenders.

6. **Removal of Online Content Depicting Violence:** We strongly endorse the need to address the proliferation of online content depicting violence against all women and girls and support the requirement for a robust legal framework. We acknowledge that the Australian Criminal Code Act 1995 contains provisions related to telecommunications offences, including the dissemination of harmful material online.
7. **Traffic Offences and Endangerment:** We endorse provisions to strengthen penalties for dangerous driving which is essential for promoting road safety. We note that the Queensland Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995 includes provisions regarding dangerous driving offences, with penalties for offenders.
8. **Protection Orders and Family Violence Responses:** We strongly support the development of amendments to legislation governing domestic and family violence responses which are critical for better protecting victims-survivors. We acknowledge that the Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 provides the legal framework for protection orders and support services for victims-survivors of domestic violence.
9. **Youth Justice Reforms:** We support legislative provisions that ensure that the youth justice systems prioritise the safety and rehabilitation of young offenders and we understand that the Queensland Youth Justice Act 1992 includes provisions regarding the detention and rehabilitation of young offenders, with a focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of our position and the objectives of the inquiry into community safety legislation, we strongly recommend the following measures to further support all women and girls:

1. **Building Stronger Foundation**
  - Investing in community-based initiatives to prevent violence before it starts is essential. This includes implementing comprehensive education and awareness programs in schools and communities aimed at promoting gender equality, respectful relationships, and bystander intervention.
  - Providing funding and resources to grassroots organisations and community groups that work directly with at-risk populations can facilitate early intervention and support for individuals experiencing or at risk of violence.
  - Collaborating with local stakeholders, including schools, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and social service agencies, is crucial for developing holistic prevention strategies that address the underlying drivers of violence.

## **2. Expanding Specialist Support Services**

- Increasing investment in specialist support services for victims-survivors of violence is critical. This involves expanding funding for crisis helplines, shelters, counselling services, legal assistance, and culturally-sensitive support programs tailored to the diverse needs of all women and girls.
- Ensuring accessibility and affordability of these services, particularly in regional and remote areas. This is essential for reaching marginalised and underserved populations.
- Collaborating with community organisations and service providers to enhance coordination and referral pathways can improve the accessibility and effectiveness of support services.

## **3. Shifting the Burden: Perpetrator Accountability**

- Holding perpetrators of violence accountable is vital for ensuring the safety of all women and girls. This involves implementing legal reforms to strengthen penalties for perpetrators, including mandatory sentencing for certain offences as well as the introduction of protective orders to prevent contact between perpetrators and victims-survivors.
- Enhancing law enforcement responses to violence against all women and girls through specialised training for police officers and prosecutors can improve the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of cases.
- Providing support and resources for perpetrator intervention programs aimed at addressing the root causes of violence and promoting behaviour change is also critical for breaking the cycle of violence and preventing reoffending.

## **4. Recognising Children and Young People as Victims**

- Ensuring that children and young people are recognised as victims in their own right requires comprehensive legal and policy reforms. This includes establishing specialised support services and legal protections for young victims of violence, including access to age-appropriate counselling, legal advocacy, and trauma-informed care. Additionally, implementing education and prevention programs in schools and youth organisations to promote healthy relationships, consent, and bystander intervention can empower young people to recognise and respond to violence.
- Providing training and resources for professionals working with children and young people, including teachers, social workers, and healthcare providers, is crucial for identifying and responding to signs of abuse and providing appropriate support and intervention.

## **5. Expanding Research and Evidence-Based Services**

- Investing in research to build evidence-based services and interventions is critical for addressing violence against all women and girls. This involves supporting academic and community-based research initiatives focused on understanding the prevalence, causes, and consequences of violence, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of prevention and intervention strategies.
- Funding research projects that explore the intersectionality of violence and its impact on marginalised and vulnerable populations, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, can inform targeted and culturally sensitive responses.

- Disseminating research findings through conferences, publications, and online platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to inform evidence-based practice and policy development.

## 6. Reforming the Family Law System

- Reforming the family law system to better respond to the needs of victims-survivors is essential. This involves reviewing and updating legislation and court procedures to prioritise the safety and well-being of women and children in family law proceedings. This may include strengthening provisions for the protection of victims-survivors, such as expanding eligibility for protection orders, streamlining processes for obtaining and enforcing orders, and enhancing access to legal assistance and support services.
- Providing specialised training for judges, lawyers, and court staff on issues related to domestic and family violence can improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of the family law system.
- Collaborating with domestic violence experts, survivor advocates, and other stakeholders to inform policy and practice reforms is essential for ensuring that the family law system is **survivor-centred, trauma-informed, and responsive to the needs of diverse populations**.

## 7. Prioritising Indigenous Community-Led Initiatives

- Supporting Indigenous community-led initiatives in addressing violence against all women and girls is critical. This involves providing funding and resources to Indigenous-led organisations and programs that are rooted in culture, community strengths, and self-determination. This may also include initiatives focused on healing and trauma recovery, cultural revitalisation, community education and engagement, and advocacy for systemic change.
- Fostering partnerships and collaboration between government agencies, non-government organisations, and Indigenous communities can support the development and implementation of culturally responsive policies and programs.
- Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and governance structures is essential for building trust, promoting social cohesion, and achieving sustainable outcomes in addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Expanding on these recommendations provides a more comprehensive understanding of the actions needed to effectively support all women and girls and prevent violence in our communities.

## BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

- There are best practices in community safety legislation in other jurisdictions that Queensland can learn from. One example is the "Safe Communities Act" in Canada, particularly its application in the province of Ontario. The legislation aims to enhance community safety through various measures such as crime prevention, law enforcement, victim support, and collaboration with community partners.
- While the specifics of the "Safe Communities Act" may not directly apply to Queensland, there are aspects of the legislation that could serve as a model for similar initiatives. For instance, Queensland could consider implementing legislation that emphasises community-based approaches to crime prevention, enhances coordination between law enforcement agencies and community organisations,

and provides resources and support for victims of crime such as the "Local Policing and Community Safety Partnership" in the United Kingdom. The UK example prioritises collaborative efforts between government agencies, law enforcement, community organisations, and residents to address local safety concerns and promote community well-being.

- By exploring and adapting elements of legislation from other jurisdictions, Queensland can strengthen its approach to community safety and tailor initiatives to address the unique needs and challenges of its communities. Collaboration with international partners and stakeholders can also facilitate knowledge sharing and best practice exchange to enhance efforts to create safe and thriving communities in Queensland.

## KEY REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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[Safe Streets and Communities Act \(justice.gc.ca\)](#)

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