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## **EDUCATION, ARTS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

### **Members present:**

Mr NG Hutton MP—Chair  
Ms W Bourne MP  
Mr N Dametto MP  
Miss AS Doolan MP  
Mr N Dalton MP  
Ms CP McMillan MP

### **Staff present:**

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary  
Dr A Lilley—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Friday, 23 May 2025**

**Mackay**

**FRIDAY, 23 MAY 2025**

**The committee met at 9.07 am.**

**CHAIR:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us this morning. Thank you for your perseverance and patience, recognising that we are slightly slow in getting started, but what is worthwhile doing is worthwhile doing well.

I officially declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands in Mackay and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Nigel Hutton. I agree it is very unusual to have two Nigels in the one room but that is what you get today. I am the member for Keppel and the chair of the committee for this morning's proceedings. With me today are: Corrine McMillan, the member for Mansfield and deputy chair; Wendy Bourne, the member for Ipswich West; Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Ariana Doolan, the member for Pumicestone; and someone who I hope is no stranger Nigel Dalton, the member for Mackay, or as they call him at parliament 'the more handsome one'.

The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee with its inquiry into the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. We are here today in Mackay to hear your views and the voice of regional Queenslanders. Please take this opportunity to share your experiences with us.

The committee is a committee of the Queensland parliament and as such its hearings are subject to the rules of the parliament. These proceedings are being recorded by our wonderful Hansard reporter and will be published on the parliament's website. If you have any concerns about this or the content you may wish to provide, please speak to our wonderful committee secretary. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. Please note that you may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. If you have any concerns with that, please let us know. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

We will hear today from those listed on the program. I will then invite anyone who has indicated they wish to speak to the table to give us a brief opening statement, after which committee members may have questions for you. I would like to ask Nigel Dalton MP, the member for Mackay, to give us a quick welcome.

**Mr DALTON:** Thank you very much for coming today. I would like to acknowledge: Greg Williamson, the mayor of Mackay; Jan Clifford, from the Whitsunday Regional Council; and Ash-Lee Johnson, from the Mackay Regional Council. I do not think we have any other councillors who have snuck in. I understand this is the first time a domestic and family violence committee has heard evidence in Mackay.

When I joined the police 42 years ago, domestic and family violence looked very different. Since joining the Queensland police over 22 years ago, the prevention and detection of domestic violence has been on a long journey involving training, legislation, support, awareness and partnerships. Many organisations, communities and individuals have made it their mission to establish support services, prevention methods, perpetrator violence programs and police training. We have had stronger powers for police, changes in legislation, including changes in what a relationship is defined as under the act, and a few other important changes on that prevention journey. This journey has not been an easy road and has met many bumps and done a couple of U-turns, but it has undoubtedly saved lives.

Saying that, today the most unsafe place for a woman in our community is not outside a pub, it is not outside on a walking track, it is not on a beach or walking home after work; the most unsafe place for a woman is indoors in a house with someone whom she trusts. That person can attack her, control her and victimise her, all hidden from view. This is a very sad situation that we have found ourselves in.

I again call on all to report domestic and family violence and abuse to the police. Whenever you see it or suspect violence or control is being used against another, report it. Together we should stand up against violence against anyone, particularly those who are in relationships. I welcome this amendment to the domestic violence laws and I look forward to hearing the input from our Mackay community today.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Dalton.

**WILLIAMSON, Mr Greg, Mayor, Mackay Regional Council**

**CHAIR:** I welcome the Mayor of the Mackay Regional Council. I acknowledge the role your council is playing in a very direct way in the prevention of domestic and family violence in your community. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, after which the committee may have some questions around the hard work that your council is doing in this area.

**Mr Williamson:** Thank you for the invitation to be here today. This region has had an awakening to the domestic and family violence scourge in our community, as it is in every community around Australia, ever since Dame Quentin Bryce's campaign of Not now, not ever came through our region in 2017. After that, we had a community meeting with 108 representatives of every organisation, including a magistrate, the Queensland police and the service organisations responsible for servicing domestic and family violence victims in our area. Honestly, it was a pin drop moment when we heard the effect of domestic and family violence from the magistrate's perspective and from the Queensland police perspective. From that, we formed a domestic and family violence taskforce, the mayor's taskforce, for the Mackay Regional Council. Since then, we have been meeting three or four times a year with over 40 representatives in our community. As we have always said, we do not have the solutions because this is a generational change we are seeking in our community, but we feel that, if we do not talk about it as a community, we will never have any solutions.

Over the past eight years we have had a range of collateral campaigns, we have had a range of educational campaigns, we have had billboard campaigns and we have had stickers on rubbish bins all throughout our streets just saying that Mackay draws the line at domestic and family violence. We have also contributed to things like the DV Safe Phone which is, I think, a very innovative program. Council has about 700 mobile phones and we turn a couple of hundred of those over every year and so they get wiped, they get a single number put on them and the mobile phones through the DV Safe Phone program get allocated to nightclubs and club organisations—areas where women who think they might be having their phones tracked or think they might be being followed can just be slipped a mobile phone with the number on it that says, 'You ring that and somebody from Mackay Women's Services or somebody in our community will get back to you,' as a solution.

As a community I think we are doing a heck of a lot to try and address what is a huge problem, but it is still a huge problem in our community. It still remains, as of our last DV taskforce meeting, which was only a couple of weeks ago, the Queensland Police Service's Mackay district greatest call-out. The most amount of work that Queensland police officers do in our region is for domestic and family violence. It still remains that there are 50 to 60 DV orders issued every Thursday in front of the magistrate. We believe that if it remains that bad, if you would like to think about it in that respect, we have empowered more women in particular in our community to pick up the phone and say, 'I need help.' It will be a long time in my view before those sorts of numbers go down, because one in five males is a perpetrator. Of course males are also victims. We also do not account for the children—the families—who are victims. When you look at our regional safe houses, the houses and the family rooms provided by organisations like the Salvation Army are full every night of the week and we still have mums and kids sleeping in cars in our community. We still have mums and kids sleeping in caravans or tents in the backyard of a house of a friend or couch surfing.

So it is a huge community problem and I commend the government for having a parliamentary committee look into it because I have always likened it to the slip, slop, slap campaign. The slip, slop, slap campaign has been going for over 30 years and it is only now that I think young people in our community really recognise the fact that you do not go out in the sun without sun protection, and I think that is the generational change we need to address. This year in our domestic and family violence taskforce we have centred on respect in our community and driving respect. We have just had two major strategic taskforce meetings where we have now formed a working group of community members voluntarily to work on driving respect from the youngest age, as we believe that respect is one of the contributing factors to what is happening in terms of domestic and family violence. Thanks for being here, Mr Chair and committee. I think this is a very commendable aim for the government to throw some light on what is a real scourge in our society.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Mayor, and I reiterate our appreciation for the role that your council is taking in a very forward-facing role. Because you have this taskforce that started back in 2018 where you bring together government, community leaders, not-for-profit organisations and volunteers, you are in a unique position and I am going to try to take advantage of it if I can just for a moment. What are the three greatest challenges your committee is finding for action in this space? You have spoken very strongly around the police and the current datasets, which I appreciate and I know that we will get some further data later on today, but for your challenge to be able to take action what is the inhibitor?

**Mr Williamson:** Collaboration. There are dozens of organisations that have various areas of funding to look after some of the areas that I have been speaking about and, from our strategic meeting we have just had, that is the top of the list. There could be up to a hundred organisations that have some federal or state funding or private funding or volunteer organisations that have some sort of a role to play in keeping our community safe, particularly in domestic and family violence. If we can bring those together, if we can have a sharing of information—and sometimes that is not legally possible because of privacy laws—that makes our community safer and makes women and children safer in our community, that is our aim. So collaboration is the first one.

Education is the second one. In our taskforce strategy outcome we now have a focus from the principals of our major schools to come together as principals and talk about the programs that they deliver and how they can get the best bang for buck. This is private schools and state schools alike, because they are all operating on their own individual agendas. They are all doing great work, but how do we get the best bang for the buck for our community by bringing them all together? We have a community group now looking at making that happen.

The third one is community involvement. How do you empower members of the community not to walk past something that is confronting and could be stopped if we had intervention? It happened to me, and I always trot this out. It was quite a long time ago now, just after we formed the taskforce. My wife and I attended a public function. It was at a bowls club. We parked in the car park and just as I was getting out of my car there was a young fellow berating his wife and two kids screaming in the back of the car. I was about to go over and my wife said, 'Hang on, look at him. He can make mincemeat out of you,' and he was very angry. I stopped and I thought, 'How do you stop this?' He must have recognised who I was and then slammed the door and walked off and the kids were crying, so it is about what do you do in that situation? That is a community education program that we are hoping to solve by all of our billboards—'Here's the number to ring. If you see something, don't walk past it. Ring that number or if the victim is there offer that number to the victim.' That is a broad program to try and educate a community to try and do that. So those are the three most complicated environments that we have to try to solve, and we are trying.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

**Ms McMILLAN:** I just want to say congratulations to you, Mayor, in terms of what I am hearing that you are doing here in Mackay. It would be great if you could chat to the local mayor in Brisbane. The initiatives that you are engaging in and have initiated here are tremendous, so well done.

**Mr Williamson:** Thank you.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Thank you for all that you do to support women and children here in Mackay. Mayor, how is domestic and family violence in the community impacting other service offerings and local issues such as housing?

**Mr Williamson:** I think the lack of housing can contribute in some way when communities are confined or when they cannot find a house to live in or the rental vacancy rates are about 0.6 per cent now in our community, so there are no houses to rent really, but the rents themselves are just skyrocketing and that has an enormous socio-economic impact on families who are struggling in the first place. Mackay Women's Services will be able to tell you a little bit more about that because they interact with those clients every day, but anecdotally we know of the trauma that is produced by not being able to pay for your kids' school items, by not being able to feed your kids because the rents are so high at the places that you are trying to rent. That also leads to domestic and family violence. One of our central schools here actually provides breakfast for around 40 kids every day. This is a central urban area school. They do the washing for about 20 families, and so the impacts are huge. I have just had correspondence from that school saying that they have had altercations now in the school grounds this year because families are stretched to the limit and that breeds a lot of anger that is now flowing over past the school gate. So it is a huge problem, and I probably wandered off the direct question line that you had.

**Ms McMILLAN:** I think what you are suggesting is certainly what we are hearing, Chair, around the state. I guess the cost of rents is preventing, in some cases, women from leaving situations that are unsafe.

**Mr Williamson:** There is no doubt, but that is only anecdotal from me. You will get the real answers from Mackay Women's Services, which you are going to hear from shortly.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Yes. Thank you, Mayor.

**CHAIR:** Mr Mayor, I am very conscious of your time and that we have already exceeded when you were due to depart and I know you have a very busy schedule, so on behalf of the committee—unless there is a burning need for a question—I want to thank you very much for your time and for the service that you and all of your council is doing for your community. I believe you have an LGAQ local government domestic violence event occurring here in Mackay very shortly.

**Mr Williamson:** Yes, we have, and it is fantastic to have the LGAQ bring their focus on that issue for all the 77 councils of Queensland. We have been happy to provide whatever services we can, but I do not think we are doing a whole heap in terms of providing the solutions because it is so hard. As I said at the start, if communities do not start talking about it and do not start bringing all of the players on board to work collaboratively to solve the problem, you just remain behind the eight ball all the time. So we are doing what we can, Mr Chair, and thanks very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Mayor.

**BERG, Mrs Belinda, Chief Executive Officer, Mackay Women's Services**

**GRAY, Ms Melanie, High Risk Team Coordinator, Mackay Women's Services**

**IRWIN, Ms Stacy, Practice Manager, Mackay Women's Services**

**CHAIR:** I officially welcome you, and thank you for appearing before our committee today. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, after which committee members may have some questions for you around the work that you are doing here supporting the community of Mackay.

**Mrs Berg:** Thank you and good morning. I am the chief executive officer of Domestic Violence Resource Service (Mackay & Region), also known as Mackay Women's Services. Thank you to the Queensland parliament's Education, Arts and Communities Committee for the opportunity to provide a statement at the public hearing on the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. One of the bill's key objectives is the introduction of a legislative framework for police protection directions. This measure aims to enhance the operational efficiency of police responses to domestic and family violence incidents and addresses the current challenges posed by the existing legislative framework.

Our counterparts across the state that deliver domestic and family violence support services have raised concerns about systemic failures in correctly identifying the predominant aggressor in domestic and family violence cases. These concerns stem from failures to take a holistic view of the relationship and consider the broader pattern of prior violence, leading to misidentification of the true aggressor. For example, a victim-survivor may have experienced prolonged abuse over an extended period and may eventually respond. In such instances, the Queensland Police Service may issue police protection directives without fully considering the broader context such as the relationship history and the underlying patterns of abuse that led to the incident.

I will now hand over to our practice manager, Stacy Irwin, who is the clinical lead in our service, who will provide further insight and localised information.

**Ms Irwin:** Good morning, everybody. I would like to begin by acknowledging the terrible impact of domestic and family violence on individuals, families and communities, and the strength and resilience of the children and adults who have and are still experiencing family violence. I would like to also pay respect to those who did not survive and to their family members and friends. Today I will be speaking on behalf of Mackay Women's Service, our staff, and in support of our stakeholders, community partners and, importantly, our community members. You have heard from Belinda with regard to the voice of our broader partners and service providers operating across Queensland, noting the ongoing challenges we see in relation to the misidentification of the person most in need of protection. Cases of misidentification have significant and potentially life-threatening consequences for victim-survivors.

Accurate identification of the person most in need of protection can be challenging and can require a holistic assessment of the relationship history, individual histories and factors that may not be easily recognised at the time of the QPS attendance. While we respect and understand that our police force work diligently to ensure victim-survivors are safe and supported, evidence suggests that this process can be flawed. I am going to hand over to one of our frontline workers, high-risk team coordinator, Melanie Gray, who is going to speak to two examples of localised misidentification.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Stacy. We have prepared two, de-identified examples where there has been misidentification. The person most in need of protection, who I will refer to as the victim-survivor, was a 35-year-old female. The primary aggressor, who I will now refer to as the PUV, or person using violence, was a 36-year-old male. There were two children, five and 10 years old, and the victim-survivor was 10 weeks pregnant. Both parties work full-time. The PUV would regularly incite arguments by moving money from the couple's shared account to his personal account. She would then become upset with the PUV, the arguments would escalate to physical violence and the PUV would strangle her. This was a regular occurrence. The victim-survivor had never reported to police. Colleagues were aware of the violence due to her attempts to cover bruises, but no reports were ever made to police by other parties. The PUV also regularly made threats towards the children.

On one occasion after an argument, the PUV locked himself with the children in the house. The VS was extremely fearful that the PUV, or the person using violence, would harm the children due to his ongoing verbal threats. She then took an axe from the garage and attempted to break down a door to get to her children. As a result the PUV contacted police and a DVO was taken out with her identified as the respondent. She was also arrested and charged. During this time, the children she was trying to protect were left in the care of the perpetrator of violence. The victim-survivor contacted

our DV specialist service and was supported to make statements to police about the violence she was experiencing. Police made an application for a DVO; however, nothing was able to be put in place to protect her due to the existing order. After a long process she was supported with a withdrawal of the DVO listing her as the respondent, charges were withdrawn and the PUV to be held accountable and charged. Had the victim-survivor not reached out for service, the outcome may have been very different.

In the second case study, the PUV exhibited significant coercive controlling behaviours, including controlling her finances, when she could shower and he would perpetuate her isolation both socially and geographically. The victim-survivor later reported significant physical violence. The PUV would regularly threaten to contact child safety and have the children removed. Following a significant argument where the victim-survivor reacted to the relentless taunts of the PUV with physical aggression, the PUV contacted police who incorrectly identified him as the person most in need of protection. A DVO was taken out listing the victim-survivor as the respondent. She was later identified as the person most in need of protection after review by police. At this time, fortunately, the victim-survivor was supported with referrals to relevant services, made statements and the QPS applied for a DVO. Delays and misidentification such as these leave genuine victim-survivors vulnerable and perpetrators without accountability. I will hand back over to Stacy.

**Ms Irwin:** We recognise the assertion that the proposed amendments are designed in part to enhance the operational efficiency of police. We would challenge that, without additional recommendations being met, the burden on police will increase and the risk to victim-survivors will either not be mitigated or may be increased. Examples of policing challenges include: eligibility for the issue of police protection directions due to a prior protection order involving another person; family law proceedings restricting capacity to issue a police protection direction in instances where police are not aware of active proceedings; non-compliant or invalid police protection directions may be issued resulting in a victim-survivor not being afforded protections; document service limitations are expected to increase administrative burden on police where a respondent may be evasive; offender is able to continue coercive or abusive behaviours without risk of contravention or accountability.

With regard to an electronic monitoring pilot for high-risk perpetrators, we are supportive in principle where due consideration is given to the following factors: a framework for identification or assessment of high-risk perpetrators for the purposes of this pilot; resources dedicated to education and training of magistrates in relation to domestic and family violence and perpetrator behaviours; and burdens on systems that are already unable to keep up with demand, including QPS. With regard to changes proposed to video recorded evidence-in-chief, we are supportive of that. I will now reintroduce Belinda Berg who will provide an overview of recommendations for consideration.

**Mrs Berg:** Leading domestic and family violence organisations across the state respectfully recommend the following considerations in relation to the issue of misidentification requiring urgent attention: data analysis across agencies to identify the extent of the issue; consideration by agencies as to whether they are adopting the risk assessment of other agencies in practice; review of integrated service systems oversight committee agencies' policies in relation to screening, assessment and risk management for threats of suicide in the context of DFV; identification of points of critical information sharing across integrated service response to supportive, collaborative risk assessment processes—for example, QPS gender centred review; protection order applications; specialist DFV service referrals and high-risk team multiagency panel processes—and, finally, development and inclusion of a confidential predominant aggressive screening tool into the domestic and family violence common risk and safety framework, otherwise known as CRASF, suite prior to implementing the PUV tools. These recommendations have been repeatedly raised and committed to in the project working groups.

These recommendations aside, I would like to share with the committee that locally Mackay Women's Service have a very strong relationship with QPS and work very closely with the victim protection unit and pride ourselves on that relationship and how we work closely together and, in particular, with our high-risk team and our other agencies. Thank you for hearing us today. I thank my frontline worker and my clinical lead for being by my side today as we share with you some of this information.

**CHAIR:** Thank you to each of you for taking the time to provide such a fulsome submission. I know that the committee will have questions for you so I appreciate the time you will give. For the benefit of the broader audience at our hearing today, the nature of the topic that we are addressing is intrinsically not only a scourge on our community but also will mean that we will hear challenging stories. It means that we may hear raw information and things that for us, individually or collectively, cause us to have consternation or concern. It may bring up past traumas that we have experienced

ourselves. I would like to remind you all that this is a safe place, but it is a place where we are going to hear such stories because if we cannot speak the truth, if we do not hear these honest things that have occurred, then we cannot possibly take on the challenge of trying to have interventions that resolve them. Andrew, our committee secretary, has provided a list of support services available so if someone finds today that they are triggered by something that they hear and would like to reach out, know that there are supports available. Just as we have to hear the truth, we have to make sure that we are looking after our own mental health along that journey today.

My first question is for Belinda in relation to the nature of your service. Not coming from your region, can you give us a rough idea of the FTE of your organisation but also the client base that you have? Are we talking servicing the needs of Mackay itself or is it Mackay and the region? What does your client base look like: is it young women, older women?

**Mrs Berg:** Mackay Women's Service covers Mackay, the Isaacs and the Whitsundays. We currently have 33 staff within our organisation—25 clinicians, qualified counsellors, who are providing the frontline services. We are the lead accredited agency for our region. We provide a range of services: emergency crisis intake, assessment and safety assessment. Essentially we are working with the victim-survivors—families, children and adolescents—to take them on a journey from initial intake, which could be a very small simple process of assessing immediate needs, connecting them with the appropriate service, through to spending quite a length of time working with us and working through therapeutic counselling and then potentially on to some of the programs that we provide. We work with men as well and provide behavioural change programs. We are also the lead for the high-risk team. Melanie is the coordinator of the high-risk team. What I might do is get Melanie to explain exactly what that is because that is a very important part of what we do and then I will get Stacy to do a few additions to what I have just said.

**Ms Gray:** The high-risk team services the Mackay area and it is a multiagency approach in the area. We meet weekly to discuss those cases where we have identified significant risks of harm or lethality to victims and their children. The aim of it is to have actions so that we can try and increase that person's safety.

**Ms Irwin:** In relation to the part of your question around what kind of clientele are we seeing, it is predominantly women, of course. The age is broad. The type of person that we are seeing is broad. We know that domestic and family violence does not discriminate. We are seeing people from the ages of 16 right up to the age of 80 and beyond. We recently had someone come across my desk who was 87—just last week. This is again a really broad issue and not confined to any one age group or one socio-economic status of person. In relation to the number of people we are seeing, it grows daily. As an organisation, we have almost doubled in size in our clinical space over the last 18 months. We will continue to grow because we are required to meet the needs that are being presented to us by our community. Whilst we recognise that initiatives and things around raising awareness are fantastic—we want more of them; it is wonderful—it does mean that more victim-survivors are becoming empowered to reach out for support, which is wonderful, but we need to have supports available.

**Mrs Berg:** We have had—I will call them interactions, so it could be a counselling appointment through to a walk-in—over 2,000 interactions year to date through our service.

**Ms McMILLAN:** I thank you immensely for the work that you do. I am particularly interested in and very proud of the work you are doing around the men's behaviour change programs. I think that is a tremendous initiative that really will have some great outcomes. The one-year PPD versus the five-year DVO, what are the opportunities or otherwise in relation to intervening and providing that opportunity for the men's cultural change programs? Do you foresee any concerns there?

**Mrs Berg:** We were talking about that earlier.

**Ms Irwin:** Look, there are definitely opportunities. We do not actually look after the men's programs in the Mackay region; we look after the Isaacs and the Whitsundays regions. It would be wonderful if we had a representative today to speak on behalf of Mackay as well. I think the opportunity is there for intervention at that point. I think considerations need to be made around capacity and the level of engagement from a person using violence. It is one thing for someone to be ordered to complete one of these courses; it is another thing entirely for them to be engaged effectively. Without effective engagement and a want for change, change does not occur.

**Ms BOURNE:** Thanks so much for that comprehensive explanation of what you do. It is very critical work that you are doing, so thank you. It is helpful, or otherwise, to have the QPS investigating themselves regarding gender centred reviews and misidentification?



**Ms Gray:** I know that the vulnerable persons unit here are doing that and reviewing all of the female respondents who are coming through. I think it is fantastic that they are doing that.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Thank you ladies, not only for your very clear submission but also for presenting to the committee today on such an important topic. I thank you also for the work you are doing locally in Mackay. My interest is around misidentification. You spoke about two scenarios of misidentification where victims were de-identified. I am sure there are many more, otherwise I imagine you would not have brought it up. Can you talk to the committee about how misidentification can affect everything from blue cards to employment and even the way that the person who is misidentified is viewed by the community? What are the flow-on effects from misidentification?

**Ms Gray:** All of those things that you have mentioned. There is also a huge risk of homelessness because quite often there are ouster conditions added so they cannot be in the home. We have had cases where they have lost their employment for various reasons in relation to a domestic violence scenario, so, yes, it has a very wide impact on somebody's life—as well as trauma.

**Mr DALTON:** Ladies, thank you again for what you do in our community. You have my full support. I wanted to know if you could think of something which could be done better at 2 o'clock in the morning when police attend an event very similar to what Melanie has described. How can they do better at identifying the correct person? Have you got an idea which will reduce misidentification—which is dropping percentage wise; it is not perfect and it will take a long time to get perfect? Is there anything that you think would make it work better?

**Mrs Berg:** I think it goes back to the education piece that the mayor mentioned. One of the benefits of a smaller region like ours, and working so closely with the VPU, is that it provides us with opportunities to provide direct education. My two colleagues here had the opportunity to meet with, talk to and educate the new recruits who came through three months ago. I think starting at the grassroots—they are the biggest advocates. We understand that there is so much information that our police have to retain, know and do. This is such a critical issue that the sooner that message and the education piece is delivered to the very new officers who are hitting the streets, the sooner those connections are made. Automatically all of that new group—of which there were 30 or similar—knew who we were, how to contact our group and they understood the connection that we have with the VPU. We were also able to share at that time that we now have an embedded police officer model. We are proud to say that we have a police officer who actually sits within our facility and works directly with our staff and can be on hand in real-time to work with victim-survivors to take statements or at least to guide them in an appropriate direction. So that early intervention, you can imagine being a new police officer on the streets, there is just so much that you—Nigel, yes. I think it is about that early education framework for police officers.

**Mr DALTON:** To clarify for those listening, when a young officer with two years service goes to these types of things, they already have to seek advice from a senior officer about the outcome for that particular incident. It is then transmitted to a senior officer who is on duty and that person will then make that decision so it is already, at the time, having a very big input but then the 100 per cent checking of those female respondents at a later date is a great way of going forward.

**CHAIR:** Thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate the opportunity not only to hear from you but also to ask questions around your service and its interactions; what is working and where there are opportunities to succeed. Thank you so much, ladies.

**PARKER, Ms Sharon, Manager, Counselling Services, Whitsunday Counselling and Support Inc**

**CHAIR:** Good morning, Ms Parker. Thank you for appearing before our committee today. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, after which committee members may have some questions for you.

**Ms Parker:** Our service provides support to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in the following programs. We provide domestic and family counselling. We provide court support in both the Bowen and Proserpine courts. We have two embedded domestic and family violence workers, one in the Whitsunday police station and one in the Bowen police station. We also have a domestic and family violence refuge for women and children who are escaping domestic and family violence. Along with our domestic and family violence services, we have a sexual assault service and we also have services for families who are at risk of entering or re-entering the child safety system. In respect of those last two services, there is an intersection between domestic and family violence, sexual assault and families at risk—they all go hand in hand.

As the manager of a domestic and family violence service, I am supportive of any changes that better hold perpetrators to account. While we have it in the legislation, I think that is where we are not probably putting enough of our focus. I appreciate the fact that the proposed amendments are working towards holding perpetrators to account. I am, as always, conscious of unintended consequences of changes though, as we all should be. My main concerns are the incorrect identification of respondents and whether the intended purpose of the introduction of the PPDs will actually provide the efficiencies that it is looking for. In terms of the electronic monitoring pilot, whether or not that will then be used as a tool by solicitors to get better conditions for the perpetrator.

We talk a lot in our services about misidentification. When I was thinking about how misidentification starts—how come it is such a big problem? I thought I would take it back to trauma because, at the end of the day, domestic and family violence is a trauma. What that means is that a person has a physiological response to danger. When we are in danger, our amygdala in our brain flicks on and gives us a warning that we are in danger and it implements whether we need to fight, flee or freeze. There is a whole load of other things that physiologically occur to us. Our frontal lobe, which is about planning and organisation, goes offline. Our pupils dilate and we become hypervigilant so we can scan for danger. Our hippocampus, around the lymphatic system, actually reduces. The function of the hippocampus is not only to express emotions but also to consolidate memories.

You have a whole load of things going on in the endocrine system where you have got blood flow going to large muscle groups away from small muscle groups, away from digestion. That is why when we get nervous or upset we might feel queasy in the tummy, we might feel clammy. It is all a physiological response. All of our DV victims have this physiological response. A fight or flight response is it is supposed to be like a light switch. You need light; you switch it on. What is supposed to happen is that the fight or flight response is supposed to switch on like a light switch and when the danger has dissipated, it switches off. For our DV victims, this switch is on all of the time—24 hours a day. This can be for years and years. When someone has been exposed to that, the light switch is on and you cannot turn it off.

What has this got to do with PPDs and misidentification? When police arrive to a domestic and family violence situation, the victim-survivor is in fight or flight response. They will be hypervigilant. They will have a lack of emotional regulation. They may go from crying to being angry to being withdrawn. This is a physiological response that is occurring for them. Because of the reduced function in the hippocampus area there may be a reduced function in their ability to recall things accurately because at that point in time their body is actually ready to fight or flee.

When police rock up to a DV situation, quite often the victim-survivor is actually emotionally labile—they will go up and down. They may not have a great memory of what has occurred. They may be patchy. They are in flight or fight response; this is a trauma response. When police rock up and they have the person using violence who is cool, calm and collected—sometimes the person using violence may be an aggressor—and you have a victim-survivor who is all over the place, who is teary, who cannot recall things, misidentification will occur.

Police are not experts in trauma. You will hear over and over again from services like mine about misidentification concerns. We need to remember that misidentification is not just about the police's lack of education; it is because police are dealing with a trauma response. Their job is to go out and deal with safety and to see whether a law has been broken, to see if there is enough

evidence—that is their job and they do a good job of that. But it is really hard for police on a day-to-day basis to really understand the trauma response because, despite increased training in domestic and family violence, they are not experts in this area.

When people come from all over the state to our refuge—women and children are shipped to us in the early hours of the morning—it usually takes about four weeks to see that hypervigilance drop. So while we can put checks and balances in place with regard to policing and misidentification, we are dealing with a trauma response. An easy fix is not always the best fix. It is really easy in those situations for police officers to misidentify who is actually the victim-survivor and who is actually the perpetrator because of the trauma response. I know that PPDs were introduced as an efficiency for police and I understand that. We work hand in hand with police all of the time and generally speaking, they do a wonderful job. We also have seen the benefits of gendered centred reviews with regard to females being identified respondents—all works that are moving forward.

My main concern with the PPDs is: are we actually putting that onus on police? Are we trying to get an efficiency by having a PPD? Essentially, the objective of a PPD is to increase efficiencies for police, but are we bypassing what the problem is? Is the problem a policing problem? Is the problem about a policing process? What are the unintended consequences of leaving police to make these decisions rather than a court? What are the consequences after the end of a yearlong PPD when someone has behaved themselves? It is easy to behave yourself for a year; it is a lot harder to behave yourself for five years. What happens to that victim-survivor where it is correctly identified but the perpetrator has behaved themselves for a year? What happens to that victim-survivor then? That year has passed. If she wants to make a private application for a domestic and family violence order, has she had time between that and the evidence that she has? Has she got a reduced capacity to actually remember that evidence?

It is twofold. One is the misidentification because the police are not experts, but where do the PPDs after a year leave those victim-survivors? Do they leave them more vulnerable? Does the perpetrator get more clever? Sometimes when we try to get a quick fix, we have unintended consequences that can have major implications. That is my take on the PPDs. I understand what the intent is and the intent is good. The intent is actually to be more efficient; the intent is to deal with it quicker. However, are we seeing unintended consequences that could be problematic for victim-survivors and put them more at risk?

With regards to the other proposed amendments to the legislation, I do not have many issues with regard to electronic monitoring. As a whole, that sounds like a solid idea. However, within the court systems, we know that solicitors already use things like forcing victim-survivors into signing parenting plans before a court date. We know that a solicitor's job is to represent their clients properly. Is this going to be another tool for solicitors to reduce conditions for their perpetrators and create a false sense of security? I know it is just a pilot at this time, but for someone who lives in the Whitsundays—and we service people at Airlie Beach, Cannonvale, Proserpine, Bowen and Collinsville—I can assure you from driving between those locations that the reception is not always good. While the pilot in itself is good, when we consider regional areas—and I am sure the pilot will not be in regional areas initially—we need to consider things like GPS coverage. It is useless if the GPS coverage drops out.

With regard to video recorded evidence, I have no concerns about that. That is more trauma informed. It does reduce opportunities for the person using violence to actually manipulate the person post initial contact with the police.

In summary, I am supportive of any changes that will hold perpetrators to account because that is where we are lacking. We are throwing money into victim services, which is fantastic, but we are actually not doing anything about the problem, which is that the perpetrators of violence are not being held to account. I am cautious with the PPDs and the onus that puts on police to get it right, and the fact that they are not trauma experts and misidentification may occur, and also what those unintended consequences may be of the PPDs once they finish in a year's time and whether they leave victim-survivors more vulnerable.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, particularly for the wholesome way in which you have explored some of those unintended consequences that you have.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Thank you for sharing your insights and for the work you do in our community. My question is around the video evidence that you said was a positive in terms of reducing the traumatic experience of giving evidence in court. How will this support your clients?

**Ms Parker:** It could be twofold in some ways. The first thing is we make the assumption that victim-survivors and people using violence are separate after an event. That may not always be the case; they may continue a relationship, whether that is an intact relationship or a relationship via Mackay

children. It does provide opportunities for a person using violence to manipulate a person—to actually wear them down—and therefore sometimes evidence after a fact may be tempered by the person using violence as well.

The video recorded evidence does capture some of those rich traumatic responses and some of that fear you may not actually capture post that. We also find that victim-survivors are often reluctant to go back to police. We have embedded workers here, as does Mackay Women's Service. That is making a big difference; it is a making a huge difference to victim-survivors. While we started our program in October last year and I saw the benefit of us being there for victim-survivors at the police station, one of the positive unintended consequences we found for our service is that victim-survivors who were not willing to make statements or breaches are now going in because they trust us and therefore they trust police.

I think it is a good thing. Is it the be-all and end-all? No, but it is a start. Victim-survivors continue to be petrified of the people using violence for years and years, and systems abuse occurs. Perpetrators will use systems. They will use the Family Court systems and they will use domestic violence court systems to continue systems abuse against victim-survivors.

**Ms BOURNE:** Sharon, I want to thank you because I have to admit I was struggling a bit with the misidentification and I think you explained that in a clear way so I have a good understanding of that now. Do you believe the electronic monitoring pilot will substantially protect victim-survivors?

**Ms Parker:** I have no idea. It is worth a shot. I have only been within the Whitsunday region for a year now in my role. Before that I worked in Brisbane in domestic and family violence services and mental health services so I am very aware that perhaps in the larger towns, like South-East Queensland, yes, maybe. I do have concerns with regard to regional areas. I could hide a victim-survivor in Brisbane in a 20-kilometre radius; I cannot hide a victim-survivor up here in a 500-kilometre radius. It is a different ball game. I think there is certainly potential for it. It may help but I do worry about it being used as a tool by solicitors to negotiate better conditions for perpetrators, which is not about perpetrator accountability.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Ms Parker, thank you for giving us your very important insight into domestic and family violence here in Mackay and broadly. My concern also is about misidentification. While going through the committee process and being briefed by the department the other day, this is my understanding of how things could play out. Someone comes down from QPS and misidentifies. That person is then given a PPD, which lasts 12 months. They have an opportunity to take that to police for review. My concern there is that when police are reviewing other police they may backup the original police decision for whatever reason. There is an opportunity to take that to court though. The problem I saw with that was you could potentially trigger a five-year order being placed upon you by taking it to court if the court ends up agreeing that the evidence suggests you are the perpetrator. Do you have some deep concerns about that process?

**CHAIR:** Just before you answer that, I am very conscious that that was a very extensive preamble. I understand the desire of what you are trying to seek in terms of an answer, but be wary of leading witnesses.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Sorry.

**CHAIR:** Also, where you want to go is great, but can I ask you to consider rewording it in the future because if you ever ask that question again I will not let you go on such a long journey to get to the question you had in there.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Sorry, Chair. I was not trying to lead; I was just trying to express what we learnt in previous hearings.

**Ms Parker:** What was the main thing you wanted to ask?

**Mr DAMETTO:** I will shorten that. Are you concerned about a misidentified person being given a PPD and the process they would have to go through to have that reviewed or removed?

**Ms Parker:** I read through the proposed amendments with regards to PPDs and the reviews for that. Again, the onus is on the police there. I know there are provisions in there for other people to trigger that review process, which I am assuming would be a lawyer. The thing with the courts is respondents do have the right to have a solicitor there who could advise them of their legal rights if they go through that process. Are you asking the question about misidentified perpetrators?

**Mr DAMETTO:** Yes.

**Ms Parker:** I think both systems are flawed in that regard. We had some beautiful examples. I recently had a migrant lady who does not have the right to have permanent residency because of where she is from. She has four children. The perpetrator is Australian. She has never, ever had a

key to her house; it is in his name. He gets Centrelink benefits; she works. There are cross-orders—these are not PPDs, these are permanent orders—against both parties. Where she became the respondent, she had tried to leave the house after an argument and he stopped her. She had gone out the back and fallen over. He had held her down. She said to him repeatedly, 'If you do not let me go, I will punch you.' She punched him. She climbed the fence that she could not open. She got in her car in her pyjamas—actually it was not in her pyjamas; it was just in her nightdress with nothing else on—and she went to a local shopping centre where she knew there were cameras, and that is where the police met her.

As she had been systematically coerced and controlled for years, when the police said to her, 'We went to see him and he has a cut on his eye,' she said, 'Yes, that's because I punched him.' At no stage did she see herself as a victim-survivor. The police did their job. They went to both parties and they did what they had to do. These are experiences that we have all of the time with misidentification of the person most in need of protection. There are major concerns in terms of misidentification which could lead to further problems. It is an area that we are still not getting right. We are getting better. I hope I have answered your question.

**Mr DAMETTO:** You have.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Thank you, Sharon. Like Wendy, I learnt so much from you. Does it concern you that perpetrators may never have to face court under the PPD process?

**Ms Parker:** Absolutely. It concerns me that it is going to prolong the process so perpetrators will then fly under the radar. Keep in mind that with a lot of perpetrators it is not just this one person; they go from victim to victim to victim. It is not uncommon for us to be working with police and having a perpetrator who has four DVOs out against them. It is a major issue. At the end of the day, we are not holding perpetrators to account. That is the issue and that is why it is not getting better. We are not doing that and, to be quite honest, we do not have enough jails to do that.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Will PPDs help hold perpetrators to account?

**Ms Parker:** In the long term, possibly not. When you look at the exclusions anyway, it is whether there is any previous violence, whether there are any weapons. I have the exclusions written here. I had to actually put them into dot format because reading through them they were so confusing. That is why I talked about the efficiencies as well because I do not know whether it is creating the efficiencies that police need.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Thank you.

**Mr DALTON:** Thank you for your superb evidence. I agree that the exclusions are complicated. One of those exclusions mentions that the police cannot issue a PPD if there is a civilian court order in place. Do you have access to who has an order or not?

**Ms Parker:** No, we do not. We have to liaise with police. We can get that information through part 5A of the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act, under information sharing. That is how we can get that information.

**Mr DALTON:** I go back to my scenario I gave the ladies from the DVRS. At two o'clock in the morning, is that available?

**Ms Parker:** It would be available to police. It should be available to police on their system. They should be able to access that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your time this morning.

**THOMPSON, Mrs Jules, Director, Broken Ballerina Inc.**

**THOMPSON, Mr Peter, Secretary, Broken Ballerina Inc.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I invite you to make a brief statement, if you have one, after which members of the committee may have some questions for you.

**Mrs Thompson:** Thank you for inviting us to speak this morning. We own Broken Ballerina Inc. We help victim-survivors of domestic violence in Mackay, surrounds and all over Queensland, really. We work from home. We are not funded by government. We are the only local service that operates 24/7, 365 days a year. We are available to police after hours because we all know that domestic violence does not just happen Monday to Friday during business hours.

I come from a background of domestic violence myself and I was a ballerina, hence the name 'Broken Ballerina'. My experiences and my observations of people falling through the cracks in the system are what motivated us to start Broken Ballerina Inc. We started in 2018. In 2019 we started with a \$50 gift card, a sausage sizzle and a big dream. We made cupcakes and slices. We are still doing that to raise money. We have an annual golf day and an annual Broken Ballerina ball. We have candle lighting ceremonies. We have one tomorrow where we will have timber crosses to represent the women, men and children who have been murdered in the past 12 months in acts of domestic violence.

For example, the other night I was on the phone until 10 pm with a 14-year-old girl. Her employer rang me, concerned. She was giving her a lift home. She rang me prior to her employee getting in the car to give me a run-down. Long story short, her mum's former partner had been incarcerated. He got only five months for attempted murder. He had poured petrol all through the house, including outside this young woman's bedroom. He absolutely terrorised mum and the kids.

I was able to talk to not only the 14-year-old; I then got to speak to the mum. It turned out that she had been given security cameras but could not afford the internet. She had been without wi-fi so she could not use her cameras. We immediately PayID'd her \$400 and she got the internet. She had an outstanding bill and she was also struggling financially so we gave her extra for food. We paid for her wi-fi service to be put back on immediately.

The police had failed to tell her that he had been let out of prison. It was only by chance that she saw an email come through and he had logged onto something that she was alerted to this. Police would not actually tell her. She went to several police stations, begging them to confirm with her that he had been released and they would not divulge that information. She actually rang the prison and the prison confirmed that, yes, he had been released.

That was one of three phone calls from the Friday to the Monday where women were in fear for their lives and their children's lives. In another case, he had also been—I do not know what the five-month thing is—incarcerated for five months and the police have told her that he will get bail. She said, 'He will kill me and come after our one-year-old daughter.'

I think everyone has done a beautiful job covering their concerns with the PPDs. I am in full agreement. I think there is extensive and ongoing training. You almost need a psychology degree to understand these perpetrators, you really do. It is a tough job for police. I admire police. We work closely with police. We provide escape bags after hours to police, which have a \$500 Visa card, toiletries and a SIM card so that they can change their number. We actually work to get women and children out of town to safety. Ideally, it would be nice if they could stay in their homes and not be uprooted and have to leave town so I am for the tracking devices—absolutely.

I am a voice for victim-survivors being one myself so I will read out some Facebook posts from real victim-survivors. I put the ABC story about the PPDs that are to be introduced on our Broken Ballerina page. I would like to share these. You are welcome to have a copy of this, if you like.

Kristy wrote—

"convinced"?! They were convinced that Gabby Petito was the abuser, then she shows up murdered. This is scary progress in the DV sector. I love that they're trying to make progress and help victims. But, I'm also very worried this will do the opposite of intended in some cases.

Standup Speakout said—

Very concerning, if Police are not experienced in Reactive Abuse and Narcissism.

That has been well covered this morning by my fellow speakers.

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Fran wrote—

Yes. It can certainly be opened up for abuse. My narc has used and continues to use systems abuse to control me all while denying physical and verbal abuse to police. He made it quite clear long ago that he “didn’t give a ... “ if it affected my blue card and my job.

One of our concerns is women losing their blue cards and therefore their jobs and therefore they are at risk of being homeless, which we see a lot of now. Women are sleeping in cars. We are paying for accommodation for women and children to stay in motels.

Tahnee wrote—

Yes! I was in this situation because I fought back after years! Luckily one of the officers pulled me away outside and said I needed to reach out for help, ring him when I can because he’s been to a home previously in his career where the female was the victim but wasn’t on reports—a month later he was called to the same property and she was dead. I’ll never forget that officer caring!

That was a positive experience.

Tanya wrote—

... there are certainly some that do care but a majority that don’t seem to ... sometimes all it takes is one supportive police officer to help you ... unfortunately you may then find resistance further along the justice system ... it’s a systemic issue ... a power struggle which a lot of victims of DV no longer have the strength to fight against.

That is our concern with the appeal process with these PPDs. If the police get it wrong, they are already exhausted. A lot of them give up because they are like, ‘It’s too hard. I don’t want to go through that.’ It is further traumatising victim-survivors.

Jayne wrote—

This is great, until it’s not. I’m concerned about this being abused, both by non genuine victims, but also by police. Let’s hope it has the desired affect and is not misused.

Ashleigh wrote—

I think it’s great, although, back in 2018, police issued an immediate protection order for myself and (our) child. This was valid until we attended court in the weeks to follow. There was a 6 month DVO in place, then immediately after that DVO ceased, he reoffended which then saw us back in court which seen a 5yr DVO against him.

I think it’s a great idea. I do not believe that officers are just going to Willy Nilly hand these out without all the facts and liaising with the supervisors prior to issuing an immediate order.

I will touch base on that. My concern is that at one or two in the morning, are police really going to contact relatives, friends, knock on Bill’s next door and ask them about the history? I do not think so. That is my concern.

Susan wrote—

Given the current skill levels of police in dealing with DV, that’s a no from me!

Ethel wrote—

Are we forgetting the Commission of Inquiry into QPS? That wasn’t that long ago. EVERYONE, male, female, gender diverse folk, First Nations People should be EXTREMELY worried about this. It’s a disaster and mark my words we will see a new Commission of Inquiry in years to come that will unpack how damaging this is.

Tori wrote—

This is a fantastic idea if they actually identify the victim correctly. So many times the real abuses pretends to be the victim.

Tori is a friend of mine and a lawyer. I used to work closely with her in the court system when I provided court support.

Vini wrote—

Not all police will do that, most of them don’t care.

Sharleen wrote—

No matter if they do give on the spot orders it still won’t stop the perpetrators from constantly offending. My ex was constantly offending and the police would only just go speak to him than he would send me an abusive text message saying “good luck that still won’t stop me” like come on! And again no surprise police didn’t do anything and just told me to “ignore it”! Even though it’s a no contact order, I feel all officers that are in the domestic violence branch be reanalysis about their duty of care and to actually follow protocol but again it’s still a slap on the wrist each time so this is why so many women have been taking matters into their own hands but then end up in jail because they are only doing the job they thought the police would do to protect them!

Katy wrote—

... yeah mine went to lock up multiple times and was let out after a few hours and would come straight back and hide in my house until I found him ... he eventually went to jail for one month!

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That is pathetic. She continued—

They should be locked up for life every month they abuse you. Mine couple have gotten five years ...

Ray said—

What a joke they don't understand or are trained to do so. I was kicked out of a house that I own and my ex still lives there ... didn't even ask for my side of the story.

Peta wrote—

I've personally seen the police completely fail women in DV situations because they didn't offer help and services to leave sooner ... anything is helpful in that regard and if they can give on the spot dvos, along with information about the help available to leave ... more ladies might leave sooner rather than later. I know this from experience.

Tah-Reece Livingstone wrote—

Twelve month orders on the spot. I feel sick. There will be misidentified victims immediately—imagine being a woman who is misidentified and has a twelve month order with no recourse to tell her side of the story in court. Then she loses her blue card. And her job. And the actual Perpetrator threatens her for 12 months he will call the cops again.

Janette Cowley wrote—

Had not thought of that

Look what happened to Gabby

I was made to look like I was the one with the problem??!!

I want to be a voice for those victim-survivors and give you some insights into what the public are feeling about the new PPDs.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I think very clearly it provides an opportunity to understand the diversity of education around what it can and cannot do and how the process works. Obviously, an important part of our inquiry is to make sure that we understand the public's perception and understanding.

**Mr DALTON:** I will call you Jules because I know you so well. The Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 also covers the recording of evidence at the scene. How do you feel that will assist or not in the investigation process and the evidence which has to be given in court later?

**Mrs Thompson:** It is needed definitely. My concern is that these perpetrators fool everyone. My ex-husband was like that. He fooled everybody because he was so calm and collected and I was in a heightened state all the time. I spoke too fast. I might have behaved erratically. To answer your question, I think it is a must, definitely.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Thank you, Jules and Peter, for all that you do for the women and children who need you. Thank you immensely. I appreciate what you are saying. I think some of the comments from women victims are quite telling and quite concerning. Do you feel that PPDs will keep women safer?

**Mr Thompson:** Our concern with the PPDs is that, as Sharon said, the victim-survivor is at a heightened level. When the police turn up, quite often more than not they see that she is the loony one and he is calm. He says, 'This is what she has done to me. Look, she has scratched my face,' or whatever else, and she ends up with the 12-month order. Then she has to go back through the trauma to defend herself. As Nick said, it could be the case that she ends up with a five-year order. That could be a deterrent. She might just say, 'I've had enough,' but then she loses her blue card and loses her job. Also, our concern is that DV does not get picked up by a piece of paper. We need to address the issues a little bit more in depth and have a look at what we are doing to lower the occurrence of domestic and family violence in the community.

**Mrs Thompson:** We need magistrates to start holding these perpetrators to account. They are giving slaps on the wrist.

**Ms McMILLAN:** In order to do that, a woman would need to go to court and a PPD prevents that from happening.

**Mr Thompson:** It eliminates the court.

**Mrs Thompson:** I am saying that that is what we need to do to reduce domestic violence as a whole. It is not just about education in schools and education for everybody. Magistrates are not upholding the laws. Perpetrators lawyer up and get a slap on the wrist. Getting five months for attempted murder is an absolute joke.



**Ms BOURNE:** Thanks so much, Jules, for those explanations. The mayor spoke about the three things that he would like to see happen: collaboration, education and community involvement. He talked about there being lots of organisations that are doing similar type of work in the domestic violence space. What do you think about those comments that he made? How do you feed into the Mackay service that is available here? How is that sharing of information happening?

**Mrs Thompson:** There is no communication. I am not able to find out information due to the privacy policies they have. I can engage with CASA, for example. They handle a lot of domestic violence cases. They get people referred to them all the time. I am able to discuss certain clients with them. Then we can discuss how we can help that person.

**Mr Thompson:** Broken Ballerina is also registered with the police so we can receive information.

**Ms BOURNE:** Are you part of the taskforce, if I may ask?

**Mr Thompson:** No.

**Mrs Thompson:** No.

**Ms BOURNE:** Had you thought of doing that?

**Mrs Thompson:** We have not even been invited to a meeting. We are just on our own doing our own thing. I would definitely like to see education in schools. I think it should be mandatory. When I was a kid we had religious instruction. That has gone out the window now. I think we should replace it with behavioural programs that educate children about what is good and bad behaviour, what is acceptable and what is not, and life skills—how to be a decent human being. I grew up in a home where parties turned into a fight club in our driveway or in our lounge room. My dad and my brothers did things in front of me that I should never have witnessed. Some of these kids are going to grow up to be perpetrators or marry perpetrators—I married two—because that is all they know. I want to see children from this high learning right from wrong and understanding the consequences of their behaviour.

**Mr DAMETTO:** I do not really have any further questions. You have been very forward in your information. I think the mayor and other witnesses may have acknowledged earlier that there are also male victims of family and domestic violence. We have heard from a lot of groups here today that are looking after women who are victims of family and domestic violence. What groups in Mackay are helping men that the committee could connect with and talk to?

**Mrs Thompson:** I forgot—we help men too. Today we have focused on women and children. I forgot that we help men as well. We fully furnished a man's house for him and his two daughters and we got them clothing and toys because they had to flee Mount Isa and start again. We have recently had a personal experience with a friend. They have lots of money. They have broken up. She is spiteful and has made vexatious allegations—not violence or anything like that. He does professional competition bike riding. When he said, 'I'm on my bike,' she has twisted that and told the court in her affidavit that he called her a 'dyke'. She has now twisted the narrative. He has a lawyer and everything, but the magistrate has said to her—she has no evidence at all. It is just vexatious.

**CHAIR:** Just be very conscious, Jules, that we need to be really wary of anything that is before the court as part of the process here today.

**Mrs Thompson:** I know, sorry.

**CHAIR:** Please be very conscious of that. We are not wanting to be prejudicial to any parties in that, recognising that there is a process.

**Mrs Thompson:** I apologise.

**Mr Thompson:** We are also providing counselling to one male at the moment. We have a counsellor based in the Whitsundays but lives in Brisbane. She does phone counselling or zoom. Yes, we certainly help men.

**Mrs Thompson:** We are going to have a perpetrator program very soon. One of our committee members is a police officer. She is undergoing all the training at the moment. We will be offering that to men.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Thank you, Jules and Peter, for the work that you do. The bill will require victim-survivors to give informed consent and sworn evidence. Do you believe that this is a better approach than typing a long, written affidavit and then having to give evidence?

**Mrs Thompson:** I think if they can just tell their story rather than—the simpler the better is my answer.

**CHAIR:** Thank you to both of you for sharing your experiences today as well as the help that you obviously give your community.

**GEORGE, Ms Lee, Coordinator, Domestic and Family Violence Support Services, Marabisda Inc.**

**CHAIR:** I welcome Ms Lee George. Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee, after which we may have some questions for you?

**Ms George:** What do you mean by 'statement'?

**CHAIR:** Would you like to share the experiences and knowledge of your service and maybe tell us a little bit about what your service does for your community?

**Ms George:** Sorry, I have not been to one of these hearings before and, to be honest, I do not know why I am here. My name is Lee George. I am the coordinator of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and domestic violence support services at Marabisda. I have been in the role now for two years. I also facilitate an eight-week domestic and family violence program that I have been delivering since 2021. I have had over 70 women participate in the program. I am a social worker. I have had my own experience of domestic and family violence. I am happy to take questions.

**CHAIR:** Ms George, we recognise that in the court system itself, as well as in the domestic violence space, there is at times an over-representation of First Nations people. The desire of this legislation is around providing greater support to victims faster. One of the outlined benefits of a PPD is not having to take a case to court. Do you think that is of benefit to First Nations families, or do you think that they are better served by attending a court process, or are there other supports in place that could be used to support them?

**Ms George:** We do support our women to go to court for domestic and family violence. I personally do not think that those new laws and the way the police are going to respond to victim-survivors during an incident and after an incident are going to work. The police always look at the women as being reactive and the men are always calm. I think they need to have more training around understanding domestic violence when they are going to an incident of DV.

**CHAIR:** For your benefit, that is provided as part of the law—that there will be more training for police officers.

**Ms George:** That does not necessarily mean that they are going to respond the way that they have been trained. They might be in a bias situation, particularly when dealing with Aboriginal women.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your response to my question.

**Ms McMILLAN:** Good morning, Lee. It is good to see you. Thank you for what you do particularly for First Nations families in the area. We know that First Nations women and children are disproportionately represented. We know that they suffer the terrible consequences of DV. Could you elaborate on why you think PPDs will not keep women and children safer?

**Ms George:** A lot of the women who come to our service all say the same thing. When the police arrive they are always in a heightened state because they have just been beaten or flogged, and the man is always in control of himself. The police actually do not see what has happened. I think it is just a quick fix to keep the courts clear of these things. The perpetrators are not punished enough.

I have just been down to Brisbane to the family law court with one client. This man has kept her tied up in the family law court for close to five years. Now the magistrate has put a temporary protection order on her because he is saying that she has been driving past his house. She does not even live anywhere near him. She has been living in Moranbah. He is just keeping her tied up with the court system. They do not need to have any contact. She has applied to go to court via telelink because she is very scared of this man. The judge has actually said, 'No. You have to be in court.' Now she has to find money to get down here. She has to find accommodation and that kind of thing. He is keeping her tied up.

**Ms McMILLAN:** That goes to the advice that Jules provided in relation to using the current systems to further exploit victims?

**Ms George:** Yes.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Thank you for coming along this morning, Ms George. I want to explore a comment that has been made by a number of people today who have given evidence to the committee. I am just trying to understand why perpetrators seem to be so calm in these situations and the victim seems to be in a heightened state. We had a very clear explanation earlier as to why victims can be in that heightened state. I am just trying to understand why these perpetrators are so calm.

**Ms George:** Because they are manipulators. They are narcissistic and they know how to work the system. They do not get punished.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Because of their ability to—

**Ms George:** They stay calm to make the woman look like she is the one who has been doing all the abuse.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Thank you.

**Mr DALTON:** Do you consider that victim-survivors would be better placed to be engaged in your programs rather than going to court, sitting around for hours giving evidence and waiting for matters to be heard by the magistrate?

**Ms George:** A lot of our clients are tied up with Child Safety, so they are mandated to come to our organisation to be able to get access to their kids. They are not just getting support from the DV program; they are coming in through Intensive Family Support because they are working to get their kids back. If they do not do those programs, they do not get their kids back. They have to do it.

**Mr DALTON:** Do you think it would be better if there were a perpetrator program which was similarly endorsed that they had to engage in?

**Ms George:** The problem is the men do not have to do it. The women want to come because they want to get their kids back. Even when the men go to jail, they do not have to do any programs.

**Mr DALTON:** Don't they?

**Ms George:** No, they do not have to.

**Miss DOOLAN:** The bill includes electronic monitoring. Do you believe that this will actually substantially protect victims?

**Ms George:** No.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Why do you believe that is?

**Ms George:** Some of these perpetrators are really tech savvy. They know how to navigate those sorts of systems, and if they are not navigating it other people are. I had one client whose perpetrator was tracking her through his smart TV. Somehow he got access to all of that. This is what they are doing. It might assist for a short while but they will find out how to remove them or track them in other ways.

**CHAIR:** Ms George, do you have any recommendations or suggestions for the committee with regard to what you believe would help particularly with First Nations communities? It is a priority for the government to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in communities and reduce the prevalence of First Nations people within the court system itself. We have an amazing opportunity with our Hansard reporter here to get some of those ideas written down.

**Ms George:** I do not think it is going to stop until people's attitudes change—not just the men but also the courts. I do not even know how to explain it to you because this is not something that I usually do. My job is to support women on the ground, so coming to a forum like this is really making me uncomfortable.

**CHAIR:** You are doing a brilliant job.

**Ms George:** Nothing is going to change until men are actually punished for what they do. The perpetrators need to be punished. They need to go to jail. The problem when they go to jail is they do not have to do programs in there. It is just a holiday for them. They can still get access to their women via third parties. When they go to jail they can still contact their women, even though there are no-contact orders, because they use third parties or they use the telephone privileges of other people in jail.

I think these men really need to be forced to do these programs and to get counselling to work through their post-traumatic stress. A lot of men do have that, particularly men living in Aboriginal communities. Our communities cannot heal until our men heal. It is the same for our women, but the majority of men are perpetrators in our communities. In saying that, women are now becoming perpetrators as well. We are working with five males at the moment who have extensive histories of DV from their women. That is another kettle of fish. Not much research has been done into women perpetrating violence against their partners. I do not know what else to say.

**CHAIR:** You are doing a brilliant job and we are really appreciative of the insights you are sharing with us. The deputy chair asked another witness about the causes. You have identified changes in the nature of DV in your communities. What do you think are the causes?

**Ms George:** The obvious first one is transgenerational trauma. There is not enough funding to go round. For us, we do not have any brokerage to assist our ladies. We have to send our ladies to the women's centre, and it would be so much better if we could just deal with it ourselves rather than sending them elsewhere. We work with these ladies. We know our ladies, and our men too—we work intensively with men as well.

We need more funding for counselling so we can get qualified counsellors. We do have a counsellor on board. She also has a master's in social work. We have had two other counsellors come in to support our families.

We need more support for the men's program. There needs to be more training around men's programs. The only way it is going to stop is if we start healing our men. I am not the only person in our Indigenous communities who thinks that. If we do not have healed men, the violence will continue.

**CHAIR:** Thank you so much, Ms George, for your time this morning. We really appreciate it.

**Ms George:** Thank you. My organisation is having a Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event, if you want to come after this. I do not know how long you are going to be. We also have food.

**BLACKBURN, Ms Vicki, Private Capacity**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. Thank you so much, Ms Blackburn, for taking the time to speak to our committee today and for being so patient. I know that we have been running over all day. Please be conscious to not mention anything that is currently before the courts, although you can speak in broad terms without referencing names. If you need a moment at any time, please take it. We can get some water for you. When you are ready.

**Ms Blackburn:** Thank you for listening to me. I had no intention of speaking at all today. I have to say how impressed I am with what I have heard here today—the improvements that have been made and the work that everybody is doing. There is no doubt that there are a lot of agencies and a lot of genuine people who really care and are making a difference.

A couple of things made me want to talk today. One of them is it is nearly 50 years since the first time I actually called the police after my father had beaten my mother yet again. I felt confident enough at 18 to be able to stand up. The police came and said, 'You really should stop doing this, Heath. It's no good.' I said to Mum, 'You need to press charges. Have him taken away,' and she said, 'He'll come back.' That was nearly 50 years ago and you have women in the same position today. There is a lot of progress being made but there are a lot of gaps in the system. I could see a lot of gaps here today. I see a lot of gaps when I talk to people. We are all working to improve those gaps, and that is really important.

After going through what we have been through, especially in the last few years with the DNA situation, one thing that has been highlighted again and again is either the victims are not heard or their outcomes are not the highest priority when policies are being made or programs are being funded. I think that has been really highlighted by Shandee's case and the DNA testing. One thing I have talked to people about, after everything we have gone through, is using victims themselves as a resource to make policy decisions—being on these committees, being involved.

You have talked about misidentification. While these ladies behind me have vast experience, when you are talking about educating police officers, children and people making these decisions, there is no-one better than a victim-survivor. That has been said to me. I do some talks—previously with Nigel and now with Steve—and when people open up, others get a very good understanding.

If you are talking about going through the court system, you need to talk to somebody who has been going through that court system for years and years because they can tell you what is not working and they can tell you what would work. Victims themselves have the best knowledge that you can get. That is basically what I wanted to say today.

**CHAIR:** Thank you so much for wanting to give agency to victims. Every member of this committee—and it is a bipartisan committee with members of the LNP government, the Labor opposition as well as the Katter Party—is here because we want to ensure the number of victims of these heinous crimes, and in turn their families and our communities, is reduced. I think that we will all take from today an understanding not only of the viewpoints of stakeholders but also of the unintended consequences of past actions and the risk of unintended consequences of future actions. I want to really thank you for taking the time to share that with us. I appreciate your time. Thank you so much, Ms Blackburn.

**Ms Blackburn:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes today's public hearing. I would like to thank everyone for joining us today. Thank you to our Hansard reporter, who was very excited and keen to join us. I know we have had some time with our team talking about exposure to prepare and help them.

Thank you to all of the members of the committee but, most importantly, thank you to you. As we said at the outset, this hearing was about hearing the voice of regional Queensland and getting a perspective that is not necessarily the same as what we might hear in the capital city. You have definitely provided that today. We spoke about the challenges of GPS tracking and having coverage for mobile phones—we need to make sure that they are aware of that when they are not only doing their pilots but also doing other things. Thank you to Andrew, who has ably looked after us today and kept us out of trouble. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I now declare this public hearing closed. Thank you, all.

**The committee adjourned at 10.58 am.**