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5 September 2016

Mr Karl Holden  
Research Director  
Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family  
Violence Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane QLD 4000

Email: [hcdsdfvpc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:hcdsdfvpc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Mr Holden

### **Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016**

UnitingCare Queensland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the recently introduced *Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* (the Bill). We welcome continued action by the Queensland Government to reduce domestic and family violence; including the introduction of further legislative measures as recommended by the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland.

UnitingCare Queensland is the largest provider of community services in Queensland and we have a long history of delivering services that measurably lift the safety, social and economic wellbeing of people across the state. Our services include providing support, advice and secure accommodation for victims of domestic and family violence and their children. We also deliver programs that give perpetrators the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and help them to develop and maintain respectful attitudes and behaviours within the family.

We have reviewed the Bill in consultation with our network of staff who deliver domestic and family violence services across Queensland to identify what the likely impact will be on victims, perpetrators and their families.

### **Provide victims of domestic and family violence with access to earlier and more tailored protection**

Legislative provision to enable police to more quickly issue police protection notices (PPN) and the ability to include children and other relatives in the notice is a significant and necessary amendment; Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety has identified that 61% of women who experienced domestic and family violence had children in their care at the time the violence occurred<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://media.aomx.com/anrows.org.au/s3fs-public/Key%20statistics%20-%20all.pdf> accessed 30 August 2016

It is important to note that legislation cannot, in and of itself, keep people safe. Police officers, who are often the first official responders<sup>2</sup>, need both a clear understanding of how to operationalise the PPN provision and the environment in which that they will likely be issued in. For UnitingCare Queensland this means that police officers receive appropriate training to enable them to understand how extreme distress and fear can shape the presenting behaviour and actions of victims and how they can best respond. We stand ready to share our experience to support that training.

### **Ensure victim safety is at the forefront of the justice response to domestic and family violence**

Although further improvements are planned, the court system is currently exacerbating the distress of many victims and their families. It continues to be the experience of a significant number of our clients that Domestic Violence Order (DVO) hearings are often delayed a number of times; including at the request of the perpetrator. While we acknowledge that strengthening the protection and duration afforded by PPs along with additional specialist domestic and family violence courts, like the one trialled at Southport, will increase system capacity we believe further work is required to prevent perpetrators delaying court hearings in order to reduce unnecessary stress on victims.

### **Hold perpetrators of violence more accountable and encourage them to change their behaviour**

The Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland stated that there are about 180 reports to Queensland police of domestic violence incidents every day<sup>3</sup>. We note that for every incident reported there is a perpetrator. We welcome the direction set by the Bill to support perpetrators to access services to support behavioural change.

As a provider of specialist services to help perpetrators take responsibility for their use of violence and work to change their behaviour we see the positive impact that access to these services has on individuals, families and communities. There is currently insufficient supply of perpetrator programs across the State to meet demand and we suggest that the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability work with service providers to increase capacity.

### **Information sharing with specialist domestic and family violence service providers**


The Bill enables police to share a limited range of information with specialist domestic and family service providers in specific circumstances and against identified thresholds. This provision will enable service providers to deliver more individualised services in order to achieve better outcomes for victims and their families.

We note that at the Committee's public briefing session on 31 August 2016, a number of members expressed concern about this provision; in particular around the ability of service providers to manage the security of personal information. Representatives from the Department of Community, Child Safety and Disability Services indicated that work was underway, including with the Privacy Commissioner, to develop appropriate guidelines around information sharing, use and disposal. UnitingCare Queensland stands ready to inform and support this work. We are also able to provide the Committee with information about how we currently use and store client information to deliver specialist domestic and family violence services if helpful to the Committee's work.

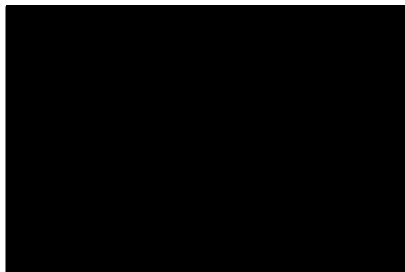
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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/dv/response.htm> accessed 30 August 2016

<sup>3</sup> Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, *Not Now, Not Ever* Report, February 2015, p.001

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments on the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* to the Committee. If you have any questions about the issues raised in this letter please contact Nina MacKenzie, Strategic Policy Manager, on 

Yours sincerely



Brent McCracken

Group Executive, Child and Family Services