

Women's Legal Service

Committee Secretary
Health, Communities, Disability Services, and Domestic and Violence Prevention Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

30th August 2017

Via email: hcdsdfvpc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AMENDMENT BILL 2017

The Women's Legal Service Queensland (WLSQ) is a community legal centre that provides Queensland wide specialist legal information, advice and representation to women in matters involving domestic violence, family law and child protection. We also employ allied domestic violence social workers who assist clients to obtain a holistic response from our service. We offer a range of services including domestic violence duty lawyer services at Holland Park, Caboolture and Ipswich, family law advice at two family relationships centres at Logan and Mt Gravatt and outreach to the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre. We also employ a specialist rural, regional and remote lawyer who operates a RRR telephone line one day per week. Additionally, we provide specialist domestic violence units in Brisbane and the Gold Coast and a health justice partnership with the Logan and PA Hospital. WLSQ was established in 1984 and has an extensive history of working with vulnerable women. In 2016, we assisted over 11 000 women.

We provide the following comments about the Bill. They relate more to issues of access to justice rather than legislative drafting or amendment

Introduction of permanent care orders

WLSQ works with many mothers who are victims of domestic violence. We are aware that domestic violence has a profound effect on the functioning of the family unit including disrupting the mother and child attachment. At the same time as these orders are introduced,



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Child Safety should develop and fund programs that promote the development and reestablishment of the mother and child relationship.

Recommendation one

That the Queensland Government fund the development and introduction of specialised programs for mothers who have been victims of domestic violence to re-establish their relationships with their children and that these programs be able to respond the diverse nature of families in Queensland and be culturally appropriate.

Women in prison

We note that Section 64 provides that temporary orders can extend orders beyond 2 years if the court is satisfied that it is in the best interests of the child for a longer time period AND reunification of the child with the child's family is reasonably achievable within the longer time.

The Women's Legal Service provides legal advice to women at the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre. The utility of such the Section 64 provision stems from the ability of a party to identify and advocate for the child's best interests. Clearly there will often be opposing views about the best interests and the lack of access to legal resources for female prisoners could in reality limit the effectiveness of this provision, despite having an arguable case.

Recommendation two

That the Queensland Government provide legal aid for court representation for female prisoners who are mothers and who have a meritorious argument under Section 64.

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully


Angela Lynch
CEO
Women's Legal Service