

Firstly I appreciate this opportunity to discuss issues surrounding family violence.

My name is [REDACTED] I am a [REDACTED] year old sole parent of three sons aged [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

I have been a victim for 13 years, I separated from my violent second husband just over 1 year into our marriage when I realised his abuse and controlling behaviour continued to escalate and he had endangered my pregnancy. Due to the IVO allowing him to return to my home he continued to come and go from our relationship until he was removed by police and charged with behaviour causing injury on my [REDACTED] old baby and breaching the IVO. He breached the following IVO 13 times. This pattern has continued over the next 12 years.

Even though I divorced him the abuse has not stopped after 13 years. It has had far reaching effects on my whole extended family including damage to my son at family court ordered access visits. As well it has effected my employment and is currently impacting my ability to perform my job as a full time primary school teacher.

Currently I am waiting police action on [REDACTED] breaches of the interim intervention order that was put in place [REDACTED] 2015.

In consideration of my very stressful personal situation and highly demanding workload I have chosen to respond to only some of the 21 Questions but I do have the experience and capacity for worthwhile contributions almost all of them.

Question Two

The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered.

As a victim who has used protection and support services almost continuously over the past 13 years I see no notable improved response to family violence. I have seen some improvement in attitude of the Victoria Police when dealing with myself as a victim. 13 years ago I found myself dismissed, my IVO and family court orders misinterpreted. I still find myself explaining and clarifying the conditions of my IVO's to police each time I have to report a breach.

Question Three

Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?

The security room at the [REDACTED] Magistrates court. It is much safer than the general waiting area we had to share with the perpetrators of family violence. However queuing and arriving at the counter inline with the perpetrators is a frightening and difficult experience.

They could be improved by situating the IVO desk adjacent to the room so victims can enter directly into the room and access the services from inside the security room.

Question Eight

Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.

Deficiencies and gaps.

1. Court representation

When victims attend court during the process of a contested IVO there is no legal assistance or representation available at court for the directions hearings, which are pertinent to establishing the content and requirements to defend the applicants IVO at the Hearing. Applicants are required to fund their own representation.

I have spent entire days at court waiting for my matter to be heard to be told it will need to be adjourned, as they are too busy to hear the matter. This has happened more than once. Legal and paralegal staff are over run with clients and tasks quoting constantly that it is a very busy day and they wont be able to spend adequate time assisting you.

However the respondents do receive legal assistance for this.

Firstly; continual legal representation for the duration of the IVO process that is free to victims.

Secondly:

Respondents should be made accountable for their acts to make IVO hearings difficult costly and protracted. Court cost should be awarded to victims including time off work to unsuccessful contests.

Thirdly;

Repeat offenders should be under far greater scrutiny for litigious behaviour and receive harsher penalties for breaches and longer durations of IVOs.

2. 000 police calls

Police response time to calls when the perpetrator is at the family home threatening victims. I have had a 40 minute wait by which time my ex husband had left. (He had prior convictions of family violence and other behaviour.)

More available police to attend to these calls with the aim of apprehending the perpetrators.

Police knowledge of repeat offenders to act swiftly to avert further behaviour.

3. Family Court orders overriding IVOs puts families at risk. Having to face an abuser each week in order to act within the law is a hideous experience and a practice only ordered in family matters. It is unnatural for a child to be driven to his father at the front of a police station by a scared and stressed mother. This is court ordered I was bound to do this. At these access visits he has suffered emotional, psychological and alleged physical and sexual abuse. My son was groomed and coerced by his father to attend these visits. He is now older and wise to this and no longer wants to see his father and at [REDACTED] years old is frightened of him.

Due to this court ordered unsupervised access my son now suffers from depression and anxiety and is unable to attend secondary school due to this.

Family court orders do not protect children, I have current legal advice that warns me that my ex husband still may gain more unsupervised access in a new application to the family court.

IVOs should override family court orders.

4. Each time my former husband decides to attempt family court proceedings I have to go through the distressing process of explaining the entire history of abuse at the Mediation process. This requires 2 -3 meetings and evidence provided to prove that the mediation process is unsafe and unsuitable.

Victims of family violence are put under unnecessary stress, this should not occur repeatedly the perpetrators should not be allowed to apply for mediation more than once particularly after a 6i section is granted.

Question Twenty-one

The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes which you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.

- I don't have enough time to respond to this fully. I am an exhausted [REDACTED] in the middle of writing [REDACTED] reports and trying to protect my family from ongoing breaches of our IVO.
- Assistance for victims to move away to hide from their perpetrators. To change their phone numbers and secure their homes.
- Paid leave for victims to attend court and associated legal and medical appointments. Although this is being discussed by the

ACTU it will take years to add into current workplace agreements such as the agreement in place for teachers.

- Support services and therapy for child victims of family violence.
- Streamline the court process for IVO's to be heard once. Provide free legal support, advice and representation by a consistent source throughout the IVO process.
- Police should follow through immediately on all breaches and not discriminate between their perception of "minor" breaches and "serious" breaches.
- Strict immediate action to protect victims from repeat offenders.
- IVO's should not be overridden by family court orders.
- Family, workplace and community education and support programs designed to educate and support all.
- Professional development for teachers and school staff on understanding, supporting, planning, teaching and assessing children who are victims of domestic violence. In school counseling and support for students.
- Provide greater government funding for support services such as Easter Domestic Violence Outreach Service and Eastern Community Legal Centre so victims can access support and legal help without waiting weeks for extremely limited services.