



### To Whom It May Concern –Family Violence Royal Commission

I would like to highlight issues that impacted negatively on my children and myself in using the systems and processes approximately [REDACTED] years ago to escape family violence from my husband of [REDACTED] years. I would be keen for the Family Violence Commission to include this information in the explorative process.

- 1) Further work needs to occur to improve access to legal process around applying for intervention orders. I have experienced prejudice in this area from the police in a rural location due to their community connections to perpetrators. At times, I had excellent experiences being looked after by concerned police officers (mostly younger, who appeared better trained in this area), who followed up with calls and referrals to specialist agencies for the children and myself. On other occasions, I experienced prejudiced attitudes and threatening behaviour, mostly by officers who knew my husband and did not wish to assist me, or worse still, openly made threatening statements towards me to discourage me from following through on applications. I believe this situation was exacerbated as I was living in a rural area. Consequently, I never obtained an intervention order, despite several police events at my home involving my ex-partner. I am aware of other women who have experienced this type of prejudice when approaching the police for intervention orders. Is there another process available to women in this scenario, maybe there needs to be an online avenue to initiate this and seek advice?
- 2) The family court requires a complete overhaul and needs to add in supports for women and children. I witnessed many questionable acts occur between legal representatives, referrals to 'mates', private fee manipulation (including charges made when services were not provided) and experienced sexist statements towards myself from lawyers who did not have any understanding of family violence, repeatedly assuming 'equal blame' and asking me 'what had I done to him'? I approached the judicial system as a respondent to my ex-husband's court application in good faith and believed justice would prevail. [REDACTED] years into this lengthy and stressful process, I was seriously reprimanded by a judge for withholding the children from an access visit following an extreme family violence event in the father's home, which the children witnessed. The judge told me I was "irresponsible". I lost faith in this system from this day forward and did not access my right to defend my ex-husband's application following this event. I realised the judiciary did not have sufficient knowledge of family violence to protect the children. Consequently, the [REDACTED] children (both under [REDACTED] at

this time) were ordered to live with their father; both children left the home of their own accord, one with the assistance of kids help line and child protection agencies.

The system of appointing an independent lawyer for the children has some merit, but when the children contacted this lawyer, it was always assumed that a parent had intervened. There needs to be an improved process where this lawyer has to keep regular contact and meetings with the children to build rapport and touch base on events, rather than prior to court hearings. I felt my children would have responded more openly to this person if they got a chance to know and trust her.

I believe the system of private psychologists providing 'family reports' to courts with questionable diagnosis is fraught with difficulty. I had many negative and stressful experiences in connection to this process, which required many episodes of debriefing to recover my self-esteem. The process was very poorly explained, very expensive for little outcome, lacked sufficient emotional support for parents and I believe, caused harm.

- 3) There are gaps when family violence is anticipated. What protection can be provided when you are aware of an impending violent event to improve protection? For example, threats of harm at a time of changeover of children.

Family Violence agencies cannot assist as they are not able to place their staff in potentially dangerous situations which makes sense. The police will not intervene until something is occurring at your home. I have been left in this situation and the best advice I could get was 'take a friend' – most of my friends were terrified. The violent incident would evolve and the police arrived well afterwards. Can you review other supports that might be available to assist women and support them in this terrifying scenario?

- 4) Further education needs to occur around professional responsibilities on mandatory reporting in schools. My children have reported serious violent events (from an overnight incident in their father's home) to the principal and other teachers. No action was taken to notify the authorities by the school. The children were permitted to return to this same home at the end of the school day without any action taken around their safety. Education in this area needs to debunk the myth it is "someone else's problem". I have lodged complaints with the Catholic Education Office (as the relevant body) and requested they review their professional responsibilities in this area. This issue needs higher policy attention and is an area that could make a significant difference for children. In attempting to engage individual teachers around the children's wellbeing and family violence, attitudes varied widely. 'Being believed' was challenging; one principal stated he had no role where "taking sides" was involved. I understand this is reflective of society as a whole and attitudes towards violence in the home more broadly. In relation to schools systems around parental contact and rights there is work to be done where family violence is alerted. I have experienced numerous manipulations by my ex-partner to school enrolments, accounting arrangements; child contact instructions which I understand make things more complex for schools. I believe schools could use some guidance in this area to set up improved systems.

I appreciated the opportunity to contribute and I am delighted to see the Royal Commission into family violence occurring.

Thank you for allowing me an opportunity to contribute.

Yours sincerely,

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