

## Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence

The Hon. John Eren. Member for Lara

I write as a representative of my local community, the electorate of Lara, which is affected by significant issues associated with family violence.

It is an issue with which I am frequently contacted in regards to through my electorate office.

Families in my electorate of Lara have contacted me on numerous occasions since becoming an elected representative for the region back in 2006 and prior to that in the Upper House since 2002.

Unfortunately, this issue is one that affects many people in my electorate. Family violence is not discriminatory; it affects people of all different cultures, countries, and age groups. It affects people from all socioeconomic, educational, and religious backgrounds and happens in both same-sex and heterosexual relationships. Children are also affected by domestic violence, even if they are not abused or do not witness it directly.

Women are 52.8% more likely to be a victim of crimes against the person than men. In 2014, one woman was killed every week by a current or former partner and so far in 2015 two women are dying from family violence related incidents per week.

The Crime Statistic Agency report found that in 2014, **68,134** family violence incidents were recorded by Victoria Police. This is an increase of **8.2%** since 2013 and **70.3%** since 2010.

In Geelong, the statistics are very concerning. In 2010 there were 1,351 Family incidents recorded by police in the region. In 2014 that number had more than double to an overwhelming 2,841.

According to an article in the Geelong Advertiser on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2014 it stated that *"Data shows there was an 89 per cent rise in family violence reports between 2009-10 and 2013-14 in the Geelong police service area"*.

It also stated that *"Of the 1250 cases investigated, almost half saw charges laid — a 354 per cent rise compared with five years earlier."*

*In 2013-14, police investigated 398 family violence reports where children were present, with 148 intervention orders granted'.*

One of the scary factors in this is that we know that family violence is an underreported crime.

Acting Chief Commissioner Tim Cartwright has estimated that there are 35,000 incidents of family violence that are not reported per year – that is one in three.

In my office, even though we have numerous enquiries for assistance in relation to family violence, we do not deal solely with this issue.

Geelong has many great service providers who are at the forefront of delivering assistance to the local community. These agencies are dealing with family violence and the effects of family violence on a day to day basis.

One such collective of social service providers is Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee(BAIFVC) .

The BAIFVC comprises a broad representation of organisations and services that work with those affected by family violence. Member organisations of the BAIFVC include: family violence services, sexual assault service, Aboriginal service, Victoria Police, homelessness and housing service, youth agency, community legal service, and rural health service. DHHS also participates on the Committee. The core partner agencies are:

- Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault
- Barwon Community Legal Service
- Bethany Community Support
- Colac Area Health
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Minerva Community Services
- Time for Youth
- SalvoConnect
- Victoria Police
- Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative

The Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee (BAIFVC) works collaboratively to identify issues and potential improvements in the Barwon area's response to women and children experiencing family violence, and men who perpetrate it. The BAIFVC drives and monitors the integration of family violence services at the local area level, and oversees the reform process.

While I am aware that the BAIFVC are making their own submission into this Royal Commission into Family Violence, I wanted to ensure that I was recognising the significant work they do as collaboration in the Geelong region.

Another service provider in the region is Glastonbury Community Services.

In liaising with them in relation to this submission they have asked me to note that:

*Glastonbury Community Services welcomes the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and through the broad range of work we conduct in the community sector, agree that Family Violence is a prevalent occurrence causing a great deal of harm, and represents a significant burden to the State. Family Violence intersects with many other issues occurring in a family's life, and is often a risk factor leading to Child Protection involvement. Although the issues are complex, we believe we have a continuing role to play in relation to supporting families experiencing Family Violence, alongside our specialist partners in the Family Violence sector. We welcome new initiatives and policy direction which may arise from the Royal Commission, and are ready to continue to work in partnership to drive positive outcomes in the Community Sector.*

Bethany Community Support is another support service who are doing fantastic work and have also submitted a submission to the Royal Commission.

They have four main concerns that they are hoping to raise with the Royal Commission. They are Information Sharing, Workforce Capability, Program and System Evaluation and Specialist Family Violence Services for Children.

In relation to information sharing, Bethany believes that it is through their work with men who use violence that they are able to ascertain that the system is not truly working in an integrated manner. They believe the lack of information sharing across agencies is a key barrier to holding men accountable. Bethany considers the risks associated with not working in an integrated way to be high, particularly in terms of

women's and children's safety, the safety of its workers, as well as the broader safety of the community.

Bethany believes that more could be done to build on people's knowledge and skills in terms of assessing risk.

They are also of the view that there is a significant gap in terms of tested evidence about how effective programs and the family violence system are in holding men who use violence accountable in the Victorian context. As such, they feel there is a need to evaluate programs to assess how effective they are in achieving the identified outcomes.

Lastly they believe that there are very few specialist family violence services available for children affected by family violence despite the significant number of children affected by family violence. This in particular is an area which I commend the commission to look at how government addresses this area of need..

I thank the royal commision for the opportunity to make a submission.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JOHN EREN', is located above the printed name.

JOHN EREN MP

State Member for Lara

Minister for Tourism and Major Events

Minister for Sport

Minister for Veterans