



TIM RICHARDSON

MEMBER FOR MORDIALLOC



Justice Marcia Neave AO
Commissioner
Family Violence Royal Commission

Dear Commissioner,

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

I write as the local representative for the Mordialloc district in the Victorian Parliament on behalf of my local community. The work of the Family Violence Royal Commission is vital to better inform, educate and improve our response to this sinister community problem.

Family violence is an issue that affects so many across Australia. The Royal Commission presents us with a once in a generation opportunity to advocate for prevention, whilst also ensuring there is a focus on the importance of a coordinated, long term approach to preventing family violence, and more broadly, violence against women. We have to critically evaluate how our community support agencies, law enforcement and government services and departments need to reform and enhance practices to help people faced with family violence.

It is important to understand and acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of people affected by family violence are women and children. We must challenge stereotype assumptions that look towards the actions taken by individuals who are subjected to family violence, rather than placing the responsibility squarely upon the perpetrator.

We need to do all we can to support people who come forward seeking assistance, rather than present them with a bureaucratic maze that only exasperates the stress, hurt and anxiety one faces in these circumstances. That is the overarching challenge for the Family Violence Royal Commission, to try to achieve a common sense and compassionate way for individuals affected by family violence to gain support, be safe, secure and start the arduous journey to gain normality in their lives again.

The statistics that are circulated in relation to family violence are indicative of the immensity of the problem. At a national level, one woman is killed by her current or former partner every week. Family Violence is the leading contributor to death, injury and disability in Victorian women under 45. As a nation we should be ashamed by these appalling figures and demand better of ourselves. Furthermore, in 2014 there were more than 68,000 incidents of family violence reported to Victoria Police. This was an increase of 70 percent since 2010.

Recently Acting Chief Police Commissioner, Tim Cartwright, emphasised the prevalence of the issue stating that the incidences of family violence are still significantly under reported. A comparison to family violence rates in New Zealand illustrates that up to one in three incidents may be going unreported in Victoria. This is where the Royal Commission will attempt to provide recommendations that will make it easier for people affected by family violence to come forward. As Rosie Batty has previously said, “family violence may happen behind closed doors, but it needs to be brought out from these shadows, and into broad daylight.”

Unfortunately, one of the problems that face legislators, law enforcement agencies and prevention organisations is that although there is awareness that family violence is widespread crisis that impacts our entire society, it has been difficult to fully quantify the problem. This is why it is important to continue to work on the Family Violence Index in conjunction with the Royal Commission into Family Violence to better understand and address the magnitude of what we are facing.

This adds to the concern that was highlighted by The Hon. Premier Daniel Andrews MP, when he announced the Royal Commission in 2014, stating that “awareness means little if the system is broken” and this is where the Royal Commission will play such a vital role. As the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria has highlighted, there is a need to investigate the systematic issues within the family violence response system in order to truly begin to holistically address the issue of family violence.

Advocacy services such as Women’s Health in the South East (WHISE) believe that there needs to be more consideration given to the concept that gender equity is the key to permanent prevention. WHISE outline that whilst family violence is something that can impact anyone, the majority of recent evidence has concluded that family violence is largely a gendered issue. Research has shown that it is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by family violence, and men who are the perpetrators. Therefore, WHISE believes that through addressing the primary determinants of men’s violence against women – namely gender inequality and adherence to defined gender roles – that this will begin to prevent or remove some of the motivations behind family violence.

Despite difficulties in estimating its extent and effects, it is clear that family violence is widespread, and imposes substantial costs on the community. Family violence costs the Victorian economy more than \$3.4 billion a year and constitutes 40 percent of police work. The response to family violence and the additional resources from all levels of governments are not only a community safety, support and protection imperative, but an economic issue.

WHISE has suggested that as part of the Royal Commission a long term, coordinated action strategy be contemplated. WHISE believes that to successfully begin to address the underlying issues behind family violence, there needs to be active engagement from a range of sectors including local government, health, community services, education, workplaces, sports organisations and the media. A strategy needs to be formulated in order to ensure that the entire community is being reached. This coordination of all resources within an area

would lead to a reduction in the duplication of services and therefore would enable better outcomes to be reached for the community.

The Royal Commission by no means diminishes the current work being done by organisations in our community such as WHISE. Their experiences, knowledge and expertise are critically important in informing the Royal Commission on where we are up to and what they believe are the challenges confronted on a daily basis.

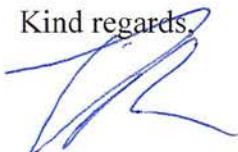
We must also consider what agencies are currently doing to address family violence and whether there is anything we can learn from their approaches and experiences. Recently I attended a launch of "Taskforce Alexis" at the Moorabbin Police Station, which brings together an integrated team of officers and specialist clinicians whose main task is to ensure families affected by family violence get the support needed. This is the first of its kind in Victoria, linking in with Monash Health and the Salvation Army in a holistic approach to family violence, mental health, crime prevention and youth. These experiences and practices will only enhance and strengthen the investigations of the Royal Commission and should be subject to review and consideration.

The findings of the Royal Commission are so vital in strengthening the outcomes that these organisations are working towards. It seems evident from the numerous contributions and studies released over recent years that the systemic problems in relation to the handling and prevention of family violence are well known. I have had conversations with constituents in which they have described how frustrating it can be to come forward with allegations of abuse. They feel that the system becomes a barrier to their fight for independence and safety rather than being of assistance. Therefore I hope that the Royal Commission can focus on the solutions to these issues and on creating a longer term coherent strategy for combatting and preventing family violence.

Changing attitudes, social norms and behaviours requires long term, coordinated action and the Royal Commission into Family Violence is an important starting point. It is worth contemplating the closing comment from the Council of Australian Governments previous family violence strategy "while living free from violence is everyone's right, reducing violence is everyone's responsibility."

This is why there will never be a blanket approach when it comes to policy on Family Violence. As outlined above, there are so many factors that need to be considered when legislating in relation to this ongoing issue.

Kind regards,



Tim Richardson MP
Member for Mordialloc

28/5/2015