



# Natalie Suleyman MP

## STATE MEMBER FOR ST ALBANS

### Submission to the Royal Commission on Family Violence

Natalie Suleyman MP

State Member for St Albans

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Family violence is a national emergency and impacts on all parts of the community. Not only does family violence make victims feel ashamed, isolated, abandoned and alienated from family and friends, the social, economic and health costs of family violence have wider implications for society.

The St Albans electorate (St Albans, Sunshine, Keilor Downs, Ardeer, Albion, Sunshine North and Kealba) has a significantly high rate of family violence related crimes. The St Albans electorate is a culturally and linguistically diverse community and many victims of family violence are faced with barriers regarding access to the justice system and support services.

Crime statistics released by Victoria Police show that in the Brimbank area which encompass suburbs in the St Albans electorate there were over 2000 family incident reports for the 2013/2014 period. Charges were laid in 639 cases, whilst family violence intervention orders were applied for in 273 cases. During the 2013/2014 period there was also 24,500 breaches of family violence intervention orders in Victoria.

These statistics are of great concern, particular given the number of deaths that have occurred in the west due to domestic violence, including the death of Fiona Warzywoda last year at the hands of her abusive ex-partner. Fiona, a mother of four from Melton West, had been at the Sunshine Magistrates Court for an intervention order hearing. She had attended a nearby women's refuge before she was tragically killed by her ex-partner outside Sunshine Shopping Centre. Fiona's ex-partner was known to police and had a restraining order out against him at the time of her death.

Whilst intervention orders are meant to ensure that women and children who are victims of family violence are provided with a level of protection, breaches of these orders, as in Fiona's case, reflect the need for a review of measures for protecting victims of family violence. Hand in hand with this is the shortage of refuges or safe homes for victims of family violence in the community.

Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Victoria and many women and children become homeless because they feel it is no longer safe to remain in their home. Without affordable and safe housing it is much harder for women and children to leave a domestic violence situation. Ensuring that women and children can secure affordable and safe housing is critical in giving them the relief they need. Women who suffer from family violence are often faced with financial difficulties which prevent them from leaving abusive homes and seeking help.

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Further, victims of family violence in the community often find it difficult to get support. This is particularly evident in CALD communities where women within the community are often reluctant to report family violence. There is often a lack of information or awareness regarding support services or victims may be unaware that they can receive help for the family violence they are experiencing. There may be cultural restraints and a sense of shame for women to come forward and report violence to the police or seek any form of assistance, which increases feelings of isolation from their community and society.

There can't be a blanket approach when it comes to policy on Family Violence and there are numerous factors that need to be considered when tackling this issue. One of these factors is providing safe and affordable housing, refuges and safe houses which are vital in tackling family violence in the community and providing women and their children with the support needed to ensure safety is the number one priority.

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