

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

26 November 2015

Community lawyers welcome proposed family law changes but further reform needed

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) and Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) welcome the Federal Attorney-General's announcement yesterday of proposed changes to the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) to improve outcomes for women and children experiencing family violence.

"These changes are a small, positive step towards improving the family law response to family violence. However, if the Government is serious about keeping women and children safe, then more reform of the family law system is needed" said Rosslyn Monro, NACLC Chair.

Some of the positive proposed changes include removal of the 21 day time limit for suspension of parenting orders by state and territory courts making domestic violence intervention orders; and strengthening the family courts' powers to dismiss an application where there is no reasonable prospect of success.

"The family law system continues to struggle to respond to the growing number of cases where there are allegations of family violence and child sexual abuse, and women are still able to be directly cross-examined by their abusive ex-partner in family courts" added Pasanna Mutha-Merennege, National Law Reform Coordinator of Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA).

"We would like to see the Turnbull Government lead the way in reforming the family law system so that it is a safe and supportive system for all women and children that have experienced family violence. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Government on this important work" said Ms Mutha-Merennege.

NACLC and WLSA support additional reforms including:

- court based family violence specialists identifying and managing risk at early stages
- legislative protections to stop direct cross-examination by perpetrators of abuse in family courts
- comprehensive training for all family law professionals, including the judiciary, on family violence and trauma informed practice; and
- improved access to legally assisted, specialist domestic violence mediation

NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.

- processes to assist in resolving cases before court.

“Another key component of ensuring the safety of women and children is access to free legal help. The top two areas in which Community Legal Centres (CLCs) across Australia provide help each year are family law and family violence. This means reversing the 30% cuts to CLCs from 2017 and guaranteeing funding moving forward are absolutely vital” concluded Ms Monro.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact WLSA National Law Reform Coordinator Pasanna Mutha-Merrenge 0434 276 048