

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

11th November 2022

waes.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PARENT'S NEXT

Thank you for affording Full Stop Australia (FSA) an opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry on Parent's Next.

About Full Stop Australia (FSA)

FSA is an accredited, nationally focused, not-for-profit organisation which has been working in the field of sexual, domestic, and family violence since 1971. We offer expert and confidential telephone, online and face-to-face counselling to people of all genders who have experienced sexual, domestic, or family violence, and specialist help for their supporters and those experiencing vicarious trauma. We also provide best practice training and professional services to support frontline workers, government, the corporate and not-for-profit sector and advocate with governments, the media, and the community to prevent and put a full stop to sexual, domestic and family violence.

FSA, as a national service, draws upon the experiences of our counsellors supporting people impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence in different jurisdictions, as well as our clients and other survivor advocates who are part of our [National Survivor Advocate Program](#), to advocate for victim focussed laws and consistency of approaches to family, domestic and sexual violence nationally.

Our response

FSA supports and endorses the submission by the National Council of Single Mother's and their Children to this Inquiry and their call for a complete overhaul and rebrand of the program, and for any program developed in its place to be voluntary and more responsive and supportive to single mothers that would in turn encourage employment (where possible).

FSA are particularly concerned about the impact of the mandatory nature of the program on single mothers who are victims of domestic and family violence.

As the committee is no doubt aware, the report, [The Choice: Violence or Poverty](#)¹, by eminent journalist and UTS Business School Professor Anne Summers AO, made clear the strong links between single motherhood, poverty and violence.

¹ [Violence or poverty: A dire choice for many Australian women | University of Technology Sydney \(uts.edu.au\)](#)

Indeed, the headline finding from the Summers research was that domestic and family violence did not cause poverty but poverty was caused by domestic and family violence. So, women leaving violence, did not start out in financial disadvantage but were driven into poverty after separation.

The other key and pertinent findings from the report include:

- 185,700 women with children aged under 18 were living as single mothers after leaving violent relationships. **They represent 60 per cent of all single mothers, a far higher rate of violence than for any other group of Australian women.** (The average rate is 1 in 6 women, or 17.3 per cent). It is important to note that these women were married or in de facto relationships when the violence occurred and are single now because of the violence.
- 67 per cent of these now single mothers had children in their care at the time of the violence and 88,000 women said their children saw or heard the violence.
- Although 60 per cent of the women who left are employed, their earnings are insufficient to support their families and 50 per cent of them rely on government payments as their main source of income. The ABS data shows that 48 per cent of these single mothers' income was in the lowest quintile, meaning they earned \$460 or less a week in household income.
- The data shows many could not pay their bills or heat their houses or register their cars. More than 17,000 women went without meals.

The Summers report is evidence for the need for drastic policy change in Australia's response to poverty, domestic and family violence and single mothers. The overhaul of Parent's Next would be consistent with such an approach.

After leaving violence, many victims face a chaotic existence having to leave their home (and children's home) to find safety. After separation many are required to have extensive engagement with numerous systems including but not limited to, the domestic and family violence sector (counselling sessions for themselves and their children), finding refuge or housing and the engagement with services around this, Centrelink, legal services, obtaining legal protection by applying for a civil protection order, family law proceedings, child protection agencies, immigration, and possibly criminal proceedings. Perpetrators of violence can be highly litigious and use systems against victims especially post separation. The idea of also facing other overt obligations under Parents Next and harsh financial penalties impacting on themselves and their children, is simply unjust.

Victims of DFV need support not punitive measures

FSA knows from our daily contact with clients who are predominately women impacted by sexual, domestic, and family violence that service responses that place a further burden on survivors, at a time when they need support and understanding can have a victim blaming effect and lead to re-traumatisation.

The very nature of sexual, domestic, and family violence is that the victim has had their power taken away from them in the most visceral way. A trauma-informed approach should be empowering, strength-based and self-determinative, rather than compliance-based and punitive.

Survivors of violence and abuse need to be supported to heal and recover from the physical and psychological trauma they have experienced, and to build social engagement and connectedness, before being compelled to take actions to seek employment. Once they get to this stage of their healing and recovery, there is often a desire to re-engage and build economic security through education,

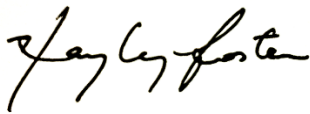
training, enterprise, and employment, but this needs to be offered in a supportive way, and not placed upon them as an obligation.

A consideration might be a partnership approach between services like ours and education, training and employment mentoring and support service agencies.

Once again, we fully endorse the recommendations for change suggested by the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children, who are the experts in this area

We thank you again for the opportunity to provide evidence before the committee. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hayley Foster".

Hayley Foster
Chief Executive Officer
Full Stop Australia

Appendix 1

Guiding principles – sexual offences (Victoria)

It is the intention of Parliament that in interpreting and applying Subdivisions (8A) to (8G), courts are to have regard to the fact that—

- (a) there is a high incidence of sexual violence within society; and
- (b) [sexual offences](#) are significantly under-reported; and

S. 37B(c) amended by No. 47/2016 s. 7.

- (c) a significant number of [sexual offences](#) are committed against women, [children](#) and other vulnerable persons including persons with a cognitive impairment or mental illness; and
- (d) sexual offenders are commonly known to their victims; and
- (e) [sexual offences](#) often occur in circumstances where there is unlikely to be any physical signs of an offence having occurred.

Appendix 2

4 Principles for administering Act (QLD) (Civil protection orders)

- (1) This Act is to be administered under the principle that the safety, protection and wellbeing of people who fear or experience domestic violence, including children, are paramount.
- (2) Subject to subsection (1), this Act is also to be administered under the following principles—
 - (a) people who fear or experience domestic violence, including children, should be treated with respect and disruption to their lives should be minimised;

- (b) to the extent that it is appropriate and practicable, the views and wishes of people who fear or experience domestic violence should be sought before a decision affecting them is made under this Act;
- (c) perpetrators of domestic violence should be held accountable for their use of violence and its impact on other people and, if possible, provided with an opportunity to change;
- (d) if people have characteristics that may make them particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, any response to the domestic violence should take account of those characteristics;

Examples of people who may be particularly vulnerable to domestic violence—

- women
- children
- Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
- people from a culturally or linguistically diverse background
- people with a disability
- people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex
- elderly people

- (e) in circumstances in which there are conflicting allegations of domestic violence or indications that both persons in a relationship are committing acts of violence, including for their self-protection, the person who is most in need of protection should be identified;
- (f) a civil response under this Act should operate in conjunction with, not instead of, the criminal law.

Appendix 3

22A Who is the person most in need of protection in a relevant relationship (QLD Bill)

- (1) A person (the first person), who is in a relevant relationship with another person (the second person), is the person most in need of protection in the relationship if, when the behaviour of each of the persons is considered in the context of their relationship as a whole—
 - (a) the behaviour of the second person towards the first person is, more likely than not—
 - (i) abusive, threatening or coercive; or

- (ii) controlling or dominating of the first person and causing the first person to fear for the safety or wellbeing of the first person, a child of the first person, another person or an animal (including a pet); or
- (b) the first person's behaviour towards the second person is, more likely than not—
 - (i) for the first person's self-protection or the protection of a child of the first person, another person or an animal (including a pet);
 - or (ii) in retaliation to the second person's behaviour towards the first person, a child of the first person, another person or an animal (including a pet);
 - or (iii) attributable to the cumulative effect of the second person's domestic violence towards the first person.
- (2) In deciding which person in a relevant relationship is the person most in need of protection, a court must consider—
 - (a) the history of the relevant relationship, and of domestic violence, between the persons; and
 - (b) the nature and severity of the harm caused to each person by the behaviour of the other person; and
 - (c) the level of fear experienced by each person because of the behaviour of the other person; and
 - (d) which person has the capacity—
 - (i) to seriously harm the other person; or
 - (ii) to control or dominate the other person and cause the other person to fear for the safety or wellbeing of the first person, a child of the first person, another person or an animal (including a pet); and (e) whether the persons have characteristics that may make them particularly vulnerable to domestic violence.

Examples of people who may be particularly vulnerable to domestic violence— • women • children • Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples • people from a culturally or linguistically diverse background • people with disability • people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex • elderly people