

## Rally for Children's Safety

Hundreds of supporters turned out on a chilly, windy Canberra day for the Rally for Children's Safety to improve the Family Law system.

The timing was perfect as politicians were getting ready to debate the government's the [\*Family Law Amendment Legislation \(Family Violence and Other Measures\) Bill\*](#) that evening.

The [Alliance for Children's Safety](#), which organised the Rally, is an initiative of 4 organisations who support these amendments, but also call for further amendments to the Family Law Act to better protect children and primary carers escaping domestic violence from ongoing violence post-separation.

([NSW Women's Refuge Movement](#), [The Benevolent Society](#), [Justice for Children](#) and the [National Council for Children Post-Separation](#))

The crowd was moved and appalled by first hand stories from mothers who have lost custody of their children because they continued to allege that their children were exposed to violence and abuse in the care of the other parent.

Domestic Violence survivor and author of 'Blood Vows', Helen Cummings told us that if her case went through under the current family law act she believed she and her children would be dead.

Dr Lesley Laing spoke about her research findings on mothers experiences of the family law system. Her report No Way to Live documents how the 'Friendly parent provision' is systematically silencing victims of domestic violence and abuse from voicing their concerns about their children's safety.

Benevolent Society CEO Richard Spencer assured that loving parents had nothing to fear from the proposed changes to the act. He stressed that the most important consideration of Family Law should be the protection of children, especially if there were allegations of violence or abuse. It was staggering that in 70 - 80% of cases where domestic violence or abuse is alleged by one partner, shared care was still the outcome, according to the AIFS evaluation of the 2006 Family Law reforms.

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement EO Cat Gander, who MC'd the Rally, relayed how frustrating and heartbreaking it was for refuge workers to support mothers and children sent to refuges by child protection agencies to escape violent relationships, who are then forced to show support for ongoing contact with the violent parent when they go through Family Law processes.

The Alliance for Children's Safety calls for a Family Law Act that:

Puts children's safety first; assesses children's safety on a case-by-case basis and protects the safety of primary carers to make children safer.

More than 170 organisations have endorsed our key messages, which can be viewed in more detail and endorsed at our website:

[www.safetyforchildrenalliance.org](http://www.safetyforchildrenalliance.org)