

WEAVE Inc. (Women Everywhere Advocating Violence Elimination)

MEDIA RELEASE: Child Safety Changes to the Family Law Act are Necessary

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Women Everywhere Advocating Violence Elimination (WEAVE Incorporated) welcomes the federal government's announcement that child safety is to be prioritised ahead of relationships with parents under changes to the Family Law Act.

WEAVE Convener, Dr Elspeth McInnes said all the research commissioned by the Attorney General had conclusively demonstrated that the current Family Law Act was failing to adequately protect mothers and children from abusive ex-partners and fathers.

'In 2010 alone there have been numerous judgments from both the Federal Magistrates Court and the Family Court where children have been ordered into the care of men who were convicted child sex offenders,' said Dr McInnes. 'Such judgments demonstrate the routine failure of the current laws to prevent children being exposed to continuing abuse.'

Dr McInnes noted that violence and abuse were key drivers of relationship breakdown and child protection services required women to end abusive relationships and protect their children from violent partners. 'Women leave to protect themselves and their children and the family law system routinely hands the children into the unsupervised care of the abusing parent.'

Dr McInnes welcomed the broader definition of violence and abuse in the proposed changes as well as the removal of the 'friendly parent provision and the section awarding costs against parents who allege, but cannot prove, violence.

'The period after separation from violent relationships is the most dangerous time for targets of abuse and neurobiological research identifies that children's development can be permanently affected if they are exposed to high levels of violence and abuse,' said Dr McInnes. 'Society has an obligation to ensure that victims of domestic and family violence have access to safety and recovery. The proposed changes to the Family Law Act are a necessary step.

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