

AWAVA

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance

MEDIA RELEASE

Family Violence Bill: a small step forward

The Australian Women Against Alliance today welcomed the introduction of the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011 into Federal Parliament.

The Bill, introduced into Federal Parliament today, proposes reforms that will prioritise safety when there is an inconsistency with a child having an ongoing meaningful relationship with another person.

‘The safety of children should be the absolute priority in family law decisions and not subject to other considerations such as “proving an inconsistency”,’ said AWAVA spokesperson Ms Zita Ngor. ‘The safety of women and children must always be prioritised in any legislation.’

In 2009, the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children stated the ‘biggest risk factor for becoming a victim of sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence is being a woman’.

It is clear that the core business of the family law system is responding to family violence and child abuse, Ms Ngor says.

‘Legislative and system responses should be reformed to reflect this reality,’ she said.

AWAVA is concerned that the Bill does not address a number of changes that are needed, she says.

‘The Federal Government needs to further examine the presumption and concept of equal shared parental responsibility. There is a significant body of evidence that demonstrates the long-term impact on children of witnessing and experiencing domestic and family violence.’

‘There is also evidence to show that some perpetrators of domestic and family violence use the family law system to continue to exert coercive control over their former spouse, including the use of children. We are all familiar with some of the tragic consequences that this has had in recent years.’

AWAVA is one of six National Women’s Alliances funded by the Australian Government through the Office for Women, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. To view its submission to the Family Violence Bill, go to awava.org.au/projects/family-violence-bill/

For more information, please contact Zita Ngor on 0417 898 322.