



## **Peak family violence experts launch joint statement rejecting legitimacy of Andrews-Hanson Inquiry into Family Law**

Press release

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Over 100 peak bodies and practitioners working to prevent and respond to violence against women and children have today launched a joint statement rejecting the legitimacy of the Government's new Family Law Inquiry.

The statement, organised by community campaigning group Fair Agenda and AWAVA, the body set up to inform government policy on violence against women, denounces the delay in real action and urges five immediate changes to improve safety in the system, noting concerns about the safety of victim/survivors participating in the Inquiry, and declaring their focus will remain on responding to the unprecedented levels of demand for safety support, with many unable to divert vital resources to this dangerous inquiry.

The statement comes after a motion to abandon the Inquiry failed to pass the Senate on Tuesday.

“The use of domestic and family violence is a huge issue in our communities. So unsurprisingly, it's also an issue in the vast majority of cases that are brought before the Family Court. Our communities are still reeling from the harrowing cases where fathers have murdered their children to punish their mother. It's unbelievable in this context that our Government is moving forward with an Inquiry that doesn't appear to be focused on child safety.” - Merrindah Andrew, Program Manager, AWAVA

“This discussion should be about safety. Under the current family law system we know that kids are forced into care arrangements with parents who are violent and abusive, and one in three kids report feeling 'not at all safe' in their post-separation care arrangements. That should be setting off alarm bells, and prompting action in line with the many, many recommendations that have already been made by experts.” - Hayley Foster, CEO, Women's Safety NSW

“As a survivor myself, and a doctor who often receives disclosures from women who are dealing with injuries that result from abuse, I feel physically ill at thinking about what this Inquiry means. Of the many women who will, yet again, be told they won't be believed if they try to speak up about violence and abuse.” - Dr Anita Hutchison, GP and Doctors Against Violence Towards Women Advocate.

“Previous reviews have already determined what’s needed to improve the Family Law System - the government should be acting urgently to implement those recommendations - starting with ensuring courts have the information and expertise they need to understand and determine what’s best for children’s and parent’s safety, including when one parent is violent or abusive.” - Renee Carr, Executive Director, Fair Agenda

“Practitioners with experience in working with people using violence and abuse in their relationships know that excuse, denial and minimisation of that behaviour and the blaming of victims is commonplace. In the same way that many police now understand that perpetrators often try to abuse the system by making accusations of violence against the victim-survivor, any review of the family law system needs to be undertaken with that expert understanding and analysis of testimony. Already this appears to be entirely absent from this Inquiry.” - Diane Coleman, Senior Men’s Behaviour Change Practitioner and Trainer with over 20 years experience working with men who use violence

“We’ve heard from panicked survivors who have been forced through the Family Court system, and have had to endure ongoing abuse at the hands of an abusive and violent partner, because of Court orders. They’re terrified about what this Inquiry will mean. And after Co/Deputy-Chair Hanson’s comments, they don’t feel safe coming forward to participate.” - Hayley Foster, CEO, Women’s Safety NSW

“It’s deplorable that even though the Government claims to be taking the epidemic of domestic and family violence and threats to women’s and children’s safety seriously, at the same time it is facilitating an unnecessary Inquiry into the family law system that is going to put so many more women’s and children’s lives at risk.” Dr Andrew concluded.

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