



National Women's Safety Alliance

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Dear Committee Secretary

The National Women's Safety Alliance (NWSA) has welcomed the introduction of 10 days paid domestic and family violence leave as a universal entitlement to be embedded in the National Employment Standards. This significant reform will assist those living with violence to access vital services or establish their own safety plans without the additional setback of income loss.

The universality of the leave provision recognises that domestic, family, and interpersonal violence does not discriminate based on one's hours or status of employment. We also know that access to finances can often be the most challenging barrier to those attempting to leave violent relationships and that cost-of-living pressures have almost certainly compounded this. Waiting to accrue sufficient leave would present an unacceptable and potentially dangerous delay. For this reason, the NWSA supports the immediate availability of this leave under the draft legislation.

However, we understand that some reservations exist with regards to confidentiality considerations and the potential impact on small and medium enterprises. We use this submission to address these concerns.

Small business considerations

The cost of domestic and family violence on small and medium enterprises is already substantial and is estimated to be around \$2 billion/year, mostly in managing unscheduled absences and lost productivity and responding to high turnover through recruitment, retraining and onboarding.¹ For small and medium enterprises, losing staff who simply need time to manage their needs related to domestic and family violence would be a costly outcome when recruitment, training and onboarding are arguably a greater drain on finite resources.

For those enterprises which already have domestic and family violence leave provisions in place, the uptake of the leave among staff has been minimal and substantially less than the Australia Institute's Centre for Future Work estimate of 1.5 per cent of employees identifying as women.² For example, Telstra, employing more than 30,000 workers nationally, introduced paid DFV leave in 2014. Within eight months of its introduction, 17 individuals nationally had used it, and their cumulative leave amounted to 45 days.³

However, domestic and family violence leave requires a recalibration of how we culturally conceive 'leave' as a workplace entitlement. While leave entitlements are typically accessed on a bulk arrangement of days, weeks or months, the premise of domestic and family violence leave is a fundamental shift in purpose. The reasons a survivor of violence may access leave are many and

¹ KPMG 2016 [the cost of violence against women and their children in australia - summary report may 2016.pdf \(dss.gov.au\)](#)

² "Only about 1.5 percent of female employees, and around 0.3 percent of male employees, are likely to utilise paid domestic leave provisions in any given year". [Title goes here \(d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net\)](#)

³ [WIT-0045-001-0001-Paroz-16.pdf \(royalcommission.vic.gov.au\)](#)



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varied, such as time needed to open a separate bank account, attend mediation or court appointments, or discreetly remove personal items from their dwelling at a time the perpetrator may be at work. We ask Committee members to recognise this shift and the reality that time blocks could vary widely depending on the unique circumstances of the individual.

Confidentiality

Lastly, we recognise the concerns of some regarding confidentiality for the individual accessing the leave in so much as it relates to items such as payslips, leave description, workplace disclosures and the security of workplace (Human Resources) records management processes. It is important to note that around one-third of workers in Australia already have access to some form of domestic and family violence leave, and best practice guidelines and policy frameworks are therefore readily available which have considered and addressed these legitimate concerns.⁴

We urge the Australian Parliament to work with employer groups, unions, the specialist women's sector, and those employers who have adopted paid domestic and family violence leave into the workplace entitlements. This collaborative approach would build on what is currently available and facilitate the development of a best-practice model as well as helpful employer guides in time for the legislation being enacted. We recognise that for small businesses, this could require assistance with training and professional development in responding to disclosures as well as possible software or asset upgrades. We urge the Australian Government to take this into consideration when preparing for the roll-out of paid domestic and family violence leave.

We look forward to following the progress of the Inquiry and welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission and the importance of paid domestic and family violence leave in addressing violence against women with members of the Committee at your convenience.

Regards

Frances Crimmins

Chair Governance Committee

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⁴ The Queensland Government developed this guide in 2020 to assist employers embed paid domestic and family violence leave into their operations and workplace policies [Domestic and family violence workplace policy guide \(publications.qld.gov.au\)](https://publications.qld.gov.au/publications/2020/06/2020-06-01-domestic-and-family-violence-workplace-policy-guide)