

4<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Secretary  
Legislative Scrutiny Committee  
Northern Territory Parliament  
[LA.Committees@nt.gov.au](mailto:LA.Committees@nt.gov.au)

Re: **Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

Thank you for your time in considering our submission. As one of the Northern Territory's largest specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services, we would like to comment on some aspects of the proposed bill.

## Background

Women's Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA) has been operating across our region since 1978. WoSSCA operates under the vision that *all women and children live safely, with respect and dignity, free from violence in their chosen communities.*

To fulfil that vision, WoSSCA works to *prevent and respond to gendered violence in Central Australia. We are committed to driving systemic change through strong advocacy and collaborative partnerships, working with the communities we serve.*

To that end, WoSSCA provides the following services, programs and projects:

- A 30-bed domestic and family violence crisis accommodation service for women and children in Alice Springs. Our crisis accommodation service provides accommodation to women and children from across Central Australia, the Barkly, South Australia and Western Australia.
- Proactive outreach and case management to women experiencing or at risk of DVF in Alice Springs and the remote communities of Papunya, Yuendumu, Ntaria, Mt Liebig, Atitjere and Yuelumu.
- Women's Partner Contact and Safety Work with the Tangentyere Council Men's Behaviour Change Program.
- Victim Support and Advocacy at the Alice Springs Local Court and the Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Court.
- Community development and training component, providing foundational training and customised training for community and government organisations across Central Australia, along with community awareness raising of DVF through community events.

- Secretariat and Chair support for the Central Australian Family Violence and Sexual Assault Network (CAFVSAN). Two members representing CAFVSAN on the DFSV Advisory Forum.
- Is an integral consortium member for the development, implementation, and delivery of the Prevent, Assist, Respond training (PART) for frontline NT Police and Health.
- Early Intervention – *U Right Sis* a community led, workshop-based response to preventing technology facilitated abuse and staying safe online ( see website [www.urightsis.com](http://www.urightsis.com) ).
- Early Intervention – *Talking Respect*, a locally developed resource and tool kit for teachers and youth workers to engage with young people about healthy relationships, with a focus on consent, pornography and its impact and jealousy ( see website [www.talkingrespect.com](http://www.talkingrespect.com) ).

WoSSCA has had an opportunity to review the submissions provided by:

- AMSANT / NTCOSS
- Tangentyere Council
- CAAFLU / NAAFLS
- Stopping Family Violence Inc.
- The National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated & Girls

Additionally, we have reviewed the media releases from:

- KWILS / TWILS / CAWLS
- CAAFLU / NAAFLU
- CAFVSAN

WoSSCA unconditionally supports the concerns raised and the evidence provided to support those concerns in the above submissions.

## **WoSSCA advises against the resumption of mandatory sentencing for the breaching of Domestic Violence Orders in the NT**

We do so for the following reasons:

1. Mandatory sentencing for DVO breaches is not evidence-based. The available evidence base suggests that it would lead to an increase in DFV and compromise both women's and the broader community's safety. This stance is supported by the findings of the Northern Territory Law Reform Committee's investigation, with the results published in 2021.
2. Mandatory sentencing is a cost-inefficient means of attempting to address DFV. In 2023-2024, the Productivity Commission estimated the costs of housing prisoners in Australia to be [REDACTED] per person. This expenditure could be more efficiently distributed for the [REDACTED] community based programs and services which could then address the anticipated increase in demand of those services.



3. The proposed amendment represents the wrong priority in terms of strengthening criminal justice system responses to DFV offending; what is needed is an investment in both prison-based and community-based programs.
4. Mandatory sentencing ignores the context in which DFV occurs and can at times compound the potential for women to be misidentified at the time of contact with Police as users of violence, instead of the person most in need of protection. This results in victim/survivors being criminalised and being gaoled by the system that is meant to protect them.
5. There is substantial potential for men's behaviour change programs in the NT to work with men diverted from a potential prison sentence. The Specialist Approach to Domestic and Family Violence Court in the Alice Springs Local Court is an example of this. Putting more resources into integrated approaches involving courts, corrections, victim-survivor services and MBCP providers, rather than automatically imposing a custodial sentence on offenders has much more potential to work towards actual and perceived safety of women and our community.
6. The reintroduction of mandatory sentencing was not included as recommendation by NT Coroner Elisabeth Armitage. Coroner Armitage completed the most comprehensive inquiry into DFSV in the NT, with her 35 recommendations being handed down in November 2024.

## Summary

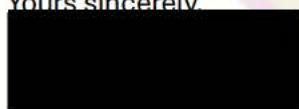
WoSSCA wishes to express our deep concern and disappointment in the failure to consult broadly and meaningfully about these proposed amendments. The DFSV Sector in the NT is a crucial source of expertise in this respect. We do not believe that the voices of those with lived experience, First Nations women and communities have been heard, nor taken into account.

WoSSCA would anticipate that the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing in response to DVO breaches would compromise the actual and perceived safety of women. It has been an expensive and ineffective approach towards addressing DFV and systemic violence in the NT.

WoSSCA calls on the NT government to engage in genuine and meaningful consultation prior to continuing with these amendments, to ensure that any DFSV law reform and system reform reflects the needs and lived experience of our community.

WoSSCA also calls on the NT Government to urgently implement all 35 recommendations of the *Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood [2024] NTLC 14*, as delivered by NT Coroner Elisabeth Armitage on 25 November 2024.

Yours sincerely,



Larissa Ellis

CEO