

TOP END WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE INC.

T | (08) 8982 3000 or 1800 234 441 F | (08) 8941 9935 E | admin_tewls@clc.net.au
A | 2/17 Lindsay Street, Darwin NT 0801 P | GPO Box 1901, Darwin NT 0801 ABN | 42 830 944 178

2 February 2018

Committee Secretary
Department of the Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 3721
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Ms. Knight,

Review of Domestic and Family Violence Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2017

Thank you for inviting submissions on the Domestic and Family Violence Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2017 ("the Bill"). The Top End Women's Legal Services Inc. welcomes the opportunity to make submissions on the Bill.

About Us

We are a Community Legal Centre focused on the advancement of women's rights. Funded by the Commonwealth Government, we provide services to women in the Top End of the Northern Territory. This includes legal advice, casework, referrals, community legal education and advocacy.

We work in areas of civil law, including domestic and family violence, family law, compensation for victims of crime, sexual assault, housing, and consumer credit debt. Our 2017 Annual Report records the most frequently requested legal assistance areas continue to be family law and domestic violence, with 80% of all clients experiencing or at risk of domestic violence.

Our submission

We welcome the introduction of information sharing in relation to specified domestic violence, noting that the Bill:

- Designates certain government and non-government agencies to share information for the purposes of assessing whether there is a serious threat to a person because of domestic violence, responding to threats and making referrals to specialist services.

- Seeks to greatly simplify decision making, by creating a permissive regime in a domestic and family violence context; and, intends to reduce the need for victims to constantly re-tell their stories, whilst facilitating coordinated and timely responses.
- The regime protects persons acting in good faith from liability, and maintains Legal Professional Privilege.

We suggest consideration be given to guidance being provided, legislatively or in administrative guidelines, on what constitutes a “serious threat”. This would assist in mitigating the chance of the term being misinterpreted.

We would consent to being listed as a “domestic violence related service”, thereby constituting an “Information sharing entity” for the purposes of s124B of the Bill, to facilitate support link referrals received.

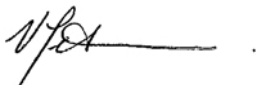
We finally note, the Central Australian Women’s Legal Service has provided a separate submission which addresses Central Australian domestic and family violence, where significant initiatives have commenced.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission, and support information sharing for specified domestic violence matters.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the writer on 8982 3000.

Yours faithfully,
TEWLS Inc.



Vanessa Lethlean
Managing Solicitor