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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs  
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## Inquiry into Family Violence Orders

Dear Dr White

Thank you for enabling Wesnet to make a submission to the inquiry into family violence orders.

Wesnet is pleased to see the Australian Government's continued interest in reviewing the family law system and its commitment to taking action to prevent family violence and abuse, and to improve the protections offered through the family law system to women and children escaping violence and abuse.

Wesnet has a keen interest in supporting the Government in these aims. Wesnet is a member of the Advisory Group for the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. As a national peak body, we use this - along with other avenues - to represent the more than 360 women's specialist domestic and family violence services who are working to help keep women and children safe.

We were grateful for the extension provided to us, allowing us to seek input from our member services. Unfortunately, due to the extreme workload pressures on frontline services, few were able to find time to consider the issue in detail. Instead, we defer to Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) who have extensive and lived expertise in the Family Law Act and its operations and who have been advocating for its reform over decades (noting also that most state branches of Women's Legal Services are Wesnet members). **We endorse WLSA's submission and recommendations.**

From our particular standpoint, we make two further points.

- Specialist women's services put women's safety at the centre of their practices through a continuous process of ongoing risk assessment, safety planning and risk

management. Best practice risk assessment and management requires consistent and coordinated approaches within and between social, health, police and justice sectors. As noted by [Reeves \(2022\)](#), “despite an increased focus on risk within Australian police services, there may be a disjunction between police perceptions of risk and actual risk to victim-survivors as determined by emerging evidence of family violence victimisation and perpetration”. When considering risk assessment, the expertise, experience and knowledge of women’s specialist services should be centred. Encouragingly we have seen this occur in a number of jurisdictions on a piecemeal basis, where police and other services are seeking the advice of our members. However governments are not necessarily recognising the additional resource requirements this places on already strained services in this climate of increasing demand by survivors of domestic and family violence, and we urge any recommendations to consider workforce and workload implications in any recommendations.

- Specialist women’s services work with other organisations, including women’s legal, services, women’s health centres, women’s information services, working women’s, centres and generalist services for diverse groups of women, to provide holistic support to women and their children so they can live free of violence. ‘Wrap-around services’ need to encompass all those supports that are available to, and needed by, women escaping violence, not just those available within legal settings.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions ([ceo@wesnet.org.au](mailto:ceo@wesnet.org.au)). We wish you well with the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

*Signed*



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