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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VSS welcomes tougher legislation to better protect victims of domestic violence

VSS has welcomed today's announcement by the State Government that it will introduce a Bill to better protect victims of domestic violence.

The Bill introduces new mechanisms to improve communication between the courts and police.

VSS Deputy Chief Executive Jodie Sloan said that the reforms reflect many of the recommendations made by VSS to the Social Development Committee Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence.

"We are pleased that the State Government has heard our calls to look at where the justice system is falling short in responding to the needs of victims of domestic violence, and that it appears to be taking steps to increase victims' safety by improving collaboration between courts and the police," Ms Sloan said.

Under the proposed reforms, the courts must notify the police before any variation or revocation of an intervention order can be made. This means that police can respond by providing information about the victim's risk that may affect the court's decision to vary or revoke the order.

VSS also supports the introduction of a mechanism which allows a Magistrate to receive hearsay evidence in relation to an intervention order where police are the applicants. We believe that this change will enable Magistrates to hear important hearsay evidence, such as that provided by family members or neighbours.

VSS also supports the proposal that Courts will have the power to treat an offender's participation and achievements in an intervention order treatment program as relevant to their sentence. However, VSS believes that the Bill should go a step further – if an offender refuses to participate in a program, or makes unsatisfactory progress, this should also be fed back to the court and taken into consideration.

VSS welcomes the amendment of s23 requiring Magistrates to enquire about the existence of relevant Family Law and Child Protection Act Orders, and to take steps to avoid any inconsistencies. However, we believe that the Bill should go further by directing Magistrates to prioritise the safety of the protected persons when addressing any inconsistencies between jurisdictional orders.

VSS' submission to the Social Development Committee Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence is available at: <http://www.victimsa.org/files/victim-support-service--submission-to-social-development-committee-inquiry-into-domestic-family-violence-%28feb-2015%29.pdf>

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