

28 April 2017
Committee Secretariat
Justice and Electoral Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington
New Zealand
Online Submission

Rural Women New Zealand

Submission on the Domestic Violence-Victims' Protection Bill

Introduction

1. Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit member based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and has an authoritative rural voice on issues that impact on those communities. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Justice and Electoral Committee on the Domestic Violence-Victims' Protection Bill. The issues addressed in this Bill are of immense importance to our members.
2. RWNZ has a robust policy and provides a voice on the rights of our rural women and families, to be able to live freely and without fear within their communities. By clarifying and identifying domestic violence as a hazard in the workplace, we can support people on a pathway out of violence.

Overview of our submission

3. RWNZ has a history of speaking out against domestic violence, and welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Family Violence Law Review in 2015. In that submission, we stated that the workplace needs to be treated as a separate issue. Often in rural areas, the home is included as part of the employment package, and as a result the home is then part of the workplace. When it comes to protection orders and property orders, made as a result of domestic violence, there are special circumstances for people who live at their workplace.
4. RWNZ also commented on the ability of the Police making safety orders, and whilst RWNZ supports Police to refer a perpetrator to the right services, it recognises that when the house is part of the employment arrangement, and part of the work place, it is not always a practical option to issue a safety order without removing the perpetrator from the property.
5. The importance of being able to access leave to travel to agencies for support, and seek legal advice is magnified for people living in rural communities. They have significantly further distances to travel in order to attend appointments with supporting agencies.

6. If there is no family support for a victim, and there are children involved, it can be even more difficult for victims to get away from the home to attend to seek support, when childcare arrangements need to be made. Whilst children can attend some appointments, such as making a safety plan to get away from the violence, it is not always appropriate for a child to be present. As a result, some victims are not in a position to easily seek support, and risk remaining in a dangerous environment, isolated from the various supporting agencies and networks.
7. Another concern for people in rural communities is that many of the supporting agencies and networks are a significant distance away, which can be disheartening for some and add to the feeling of isolation. Living in a rural communities already places an extra distance for people to travel but this should not be the case when it comes to seeking help and support, in order to get out of a dangerous and violent living and working situation.
8. In some situations, the nature of the control inflicted by the perpetrator can be severe, having extremely negative effects on the victim. If the perpetrator is particularly controlling on their victim, the possibility of accessing the phone or computer to seek help and support is not an option.
9. Of great concern to RWNZ is people in rural communities who do not have a working phone, due to a lack of coverage. Simply put, if there is no working phone, there is no way to call for help, let alone attempt to make a plan to get away from the violence. This form of social isolation is a big concern for RWNZ, and again links back to rural connectivity.
10. It is also an issue for agencies that have a bulk of their information and support networks on a website. Many rural communities already face issues with rural connectivity and accessing the internet at a reasonable speed, if there is internet access at all. These agencies must ensure they have other methods for seeking support that do not solely rely on having access to the internet, as this is a huge disadvantage for those living in rural areas.
11. It is important for the person leaving the relationship to be able to relocate to another area. Relocating requires time off to arrange things such as new accommodation, schooling for children and seeking new employment. Once again, for a person who lives rurally this situation is harder, particularly with increased distances, hence the additional time and cost involved.
12. Without the ability to take paid time off work to deal with these matters the victims of domestic violence may end up being trapped, along with their children, in a violent relationship.

Conclusion

13. RWNZ thanks the Committee for the opportunity to submit on this Bill. We would greatly appreciate the option to appear before the Committee in support of our submission. Please contact me to discuss our submission further.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PE', written on a light grey rectangular background.

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