

MEDIA RELEASE  
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**New 'divorce tax' adds to federal government's poor form on domestic violence**

The federal government's new 'divorce tax' will create another barrier for domestic violence victims trying to recover from abuse, say domestic violence advocates.

The fee change will increase the standard cost of applying for divorce from \$845 to \$1,200; an increase legal providers fear will be prohibitive for many domestic violence victims – and prevent them from moving on with their lives.

"The last thing we need from the government is another barrier in the way of domestic violence victims, and that's exactly what this will be." Says Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda.

"When women leave a violent relationship and take steps to stop the physical violence against them, the only avenues left for perpetrators to continue to control and abuse them are often financial abuse and abuse through the legal system." says Pasanna Mutha-Merrenge of Women's Legal Service Victoria.

"Women are challenged at every effort to sever their legal and financial ties with a perpetrator. We see abusers using a joint debt or a divorce as a tool to further control women. The emotional impacts of an abuser being able to continue to maintain a financial or legal tie to a victim of violence cannot be underestimated. For many victims the finality of a legal end to the relationship is very important for religious, social or psychological reasons."

Ms Carr from Fair Agenda adds: "The Prime Minister says the government is focused on keeping Australians safe – but Australian women are being murdered in family violence incidents every week – and the government still hasn't committed the funding needed to keep them safe. Instead, we now see a change that will likely make things even harder for victims. It's unbelievable."

The Productivity Commission has previously recommended that the federal government inject \$120 million per annum into the legal assistance sector to address problems, including the fact that thousands of domestic violence victims have to be turned away from services that can't meet demand.

**Available for comment:**

- Renee Carr, Fair Agenda, 0435 597 976
- Pasanna Mutha-Merrenge, Women's Legal Service Victoria, 03 8622 0600

**Quotes from family violence support services on 'divorce tax':**

Moo Baulch, CEO, Domestic Violence New South Wales

"Post separation and divorce can be incredibly dangerous and stressful times for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. Domestic violence is a misuse of power and control and it often continues long

after a woman has left the abusive relationship.

“It’s disappointing that whilst we are having more sophisticated conversations about the dynamics of non-physical abuse in intimate partnerships, the government doesn’t seem to extend that recognition to the cost of divorce. The legal system should be safer and more accessible for women and their children, this increase is a step backwards.”

Pasanna Mutha-Merrennege, Women’s Legal Service Victoria:

“Women’s Legal Service Victoria are concerned that this significant hike in divorce fees will make it even more difficult for domestic violence victims to move on with their lives and recover from an abusive relationship.

“If you’re a single parent paying bills and school fees, spending \$1200 to apply for a divorce is simply out of your reach. This was an opportunity for the Government to really support victims of domestic violence to move on with their lives – and their decision to increase divorce fees does the opposite.”

Jacqui Watt, CEO, No To Violence - Male Family Violence Prevention Association:

"Any rise in costs to a woman who requires - for the safety of her and her children - to divorce an abusive partner is unwelcome. This fee increase is another way in which women in violent situations aren't getting the support they need from our legal system."

**If you are covering this story, please include:**

*If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit [www.1800RESPECT.org.au](http://www.1800RESPECT.org.au). For more information about a service in your state or local area download the DAISY App in the App Store or Google Play.*