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### **Advocates applaud Labor commitment to university sexual violence Taskforce**

Leading advocacy organisations have applauded Labor's announcement that, if elected, the party will establish an independent, expert-led Taskforce to hold universities and residential colleges to account on sexual violence.

Today's announcement follows ongoing revelations that many universities and residences are failing to appropriately respond to, and prevent, sexual violence. Fair Agenda, End Rape on Campus Australia, the National Union of Students and The Hunting Ground Australia Project have jointly campaigned for a Taskforce to be set up.

Former Education Minister Birmingham had been set to announce a government backed Taskforce in September, but that action has been shelved under new Education Minister Dan Tehan.

"Sexual violence is the most significant safety issue on university campuses right now. We thank the Labor Party for listening to our call for action, and for such a strong commitment to deal with this problem," said Renee Carr, Executive Director of women's rights campaigning group Fair Agenda.

"However, students shouldn't have to wait for a change of Government for action to address sexual violence on campus. This should not be a partisan issue. With the new academic year rapidly approaching, we are still urging Minister Tehan to urgently establish a Taskforce to improve student safety."

Sharna Bremner, Director of survivor support group End Rape on Campus Australia said: "Right now there's no mechanism to effectively hold universities accountable for compromising student wellbeing. Even the national higher education regulator doesn't have the powers to effectively deal with this issue.

"There are still universities taking months to respond to urgent safety concerns, rape survivors unable to access counselling services, and residential college cultures where students who speak up about their assault are targeted.

"Too often, dangerous institutional failures are only uncovered when brave student survivors take on the huge personal cost of speaking out about their rape. A well-resourced Taskforce like this would help ensure transparency and accountability for universities and residences failing to do the right thing.

“We particularly welcome the ALP’s commitment to holding universities who fail to act for student safety to account. On behalf of the survivors we support, we would like to thank the Labor Party for listening and acting.”

“Unfortunately, over the years universities have proven that real, across the board change on this issue only happens with external accountability,” said Kate Crossin, National Women’s Officer, National Union of Students.

“Survivors, student leaders and advocacy groups have been speaking out about sexual violence at universities and residential colleges for decades. We’re thrilled we finally have a commitment from one of the major parties to intervene for student safety and hold universities and residential colleges accountable.” she added.

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