

MEDIA RELEASE

25 November 2011

FRSA SUPPORTS GOVERNMENT PASSING OF FAMILY LAW LEGISLATION AMENDMENTS BILL 2011

FRSA, the peak body for family & relationship services, has welcomed the Federal Parliament's decision to pass the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011.

"The decision is an important step forward in the family law system, and the recommendations made by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs have further improved the Bill" said FRSA Executive Director Samantha Page.

"The Bill will strengthen protections for families affected by violence, abuse and neglect as they engage in the Family Law System. It improves definitions within the Family Law Act and puts greater priority on safety, particularly the safety of children."

"While this decision highlights a good directive by the Australian Government, it is crucial that we continue working on the Family Law System to achieve the best outcome for Australian families."

The measures passed yesterday by Parliament include a number of changes to the family law system, including:

- The broadened definition of 'child abuse' to include exposure to family violence;
- The removal of 'friendly parent' provisions that can unwittingly act to discourage the disclosure of violence or safety concerns; and
- Increasing weight to the primary consideration of protecting the child from harm above the benefit of a meaningful relationship with each parent.

The Attorney General's Department has also contracted Relationships Australia South Australia to develop a standardised frontline screening process to identify safety risks for clients across the family law system. The aim of this project is to create a shared understanding across all disciplines in the family law system about the predictors of risks to safety, how they can be better identified and how to effectively respond to these risks.

"The changes made in this Bill, along with other recommendations made by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs including the need of a community education campaign will hopefully improve the process of family dispute and reach better outcomes for families involved."

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