

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **FRSA Welcomes Senate Committee Inquiry Report on Family Law (Family Violence and other Measures) Bill**

Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) welcomes the recommendations contained in the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Inquiry Report on the Family Law (Family Violence and other Measures) Amendment Bill 2011.

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

FRSA's submission to the Inquiry expressed support for the Bill, including the following changes to the Family Law Act:

- Changes to the definition of 'family violence' based on the work of the Australian and NSW Law Reform Commissions;
- Changes to the definition of child abuse and neglect;
- Provisions that give effect to the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*;
- Removal of 'friendly parent' provisions that can unwittingly act to discourage the disclosure of violence or safety concerns;
- Increasing weight to the primary consideration of protecting the child from harm above the benefit of a meaningful relationship with each parent.

"FRSA welcomed the Senate Inquiry on the Bill, it is appropriate that any changes to the Family Law Act are subject to careful scrutiny. The Family Law Act casts a very long shadow, impacting on many more separating families than the estimated 5% that ever file a case with either the Family Court or Federal Magistrates Court. Changes to the legislation can have a very broad impact, with more than 1 in 5 Australian children experiencing parental separation."

"FRSA welcomes the recommendations in the Senate Inquiry Report, including suggestions to further strengthen the Bill".

"FRSA also believes there is more to be done in this area; specifically we would like to see further development of a framework for risk assessment and responding to safety concerns across the Family Law System. We are also keen to work with the Government and other parts of the Family Law System to give children and young people a stronger voice in proceedings where decisions are being made about them. Every individual situation is unique and 'acting in the best interests of the child' is not always straightforward, there can be very complex factors at play that impact on safety and wellbeing. Listening to children and developing more flexible and sophisticated responses to their needs is one way in which we can drive systemic improvements in our approach to supporting families through parental separation."

The Bill will now have to be passed by the Australian Senate with the approval of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee.

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**Family Relationship Services Australia is the national peak body for over 150 family relationship and support service providers, operating in more than 650 locations across Australia. For more information visit**

[www.frsa.org.au](http://www.frsa.org.au)

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