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The Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
Attorney-General
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CC:

The Hon. Chief Justice William Alstergren of the FCFCOA
The Hon. Michael Daley, NSW Attorney-General
Ms Reem Alsalem, UN Rapporteur for Violence against Women
The CEDAW Committee

4 June 2024

Dear Attorney-General

**Sydney Family Court – Women’s Court Support Service evicted
Men’s Court Support Service installed in its place**

I refer to previous correspondence with your predecessors as Attorney General, most specifically the Hon. Christian Porter to whom we first wrote on 14 May 2019 to save the Women’s Court Support Service (WCSS – but then WFLCSS) from threatened defunding. WCSS is a non-legal domestic violence support service originally established by the NSW Women’s Refuge Movement in about 2005.

Unfortunately, efforts to secure ongoing funding for the WCSS were unsuccessful. However, we have endeavoured with the support of the Chief Justice of the Family Court to continue to operate this support service with a team of volunteers since July 2019. Further attempts to secure grant funding have also been unsuccessful despite the regular announcements made by the Federal and NSW Governments about increased funding for women’s domestic violence services.

During our occupancy on Level 5 of the Sydney Family Court we have supported hundreds of very distressed women and have observed many disturbing trends and systemic failings. We have raised our concerns in correspondence and in person with the Chief Justice, as well as in various submissions to government inquiries and international human rights bodies.

On 9 November 2023 the Sydney Family Court suddenly provided the WCSS with 6 weeks' notice to vacate the offices on Level 5 after almost 20 years of operation. Their letter cites 'operational requirements' with minimal other explanation. Our letter in reply asking for the decision to be reconsidered was met with a curt response. There was no suggestion of any complaints having been made about the service provided.

The offices on Level 5 have remained vacant for a period of almost 6 months since our eviction and just today I have been contacted by Mr Michael Bailey who advises me that a men's support service, under the auspices of FASS, will be occupying these offices from now on. Mr Bailey indicated that his service requested a larger space having expanded to two paid staff, funded by Relationships Australia. Mr Bailey did not express any discomfiture with the arrangement displacing the WCSS.

I have since called and spoken to Beheshteh Gharakhan, Manager of Court Operations, who confirmed that a men's support service will be occupying the space previously occupied by a women's support service for almost two decades.

I also note that I have confirmed with FASS staff that the Sydney Family Court still only has a single FASS social worker devoted to the support of 'individuals who do not identify as men.' Men are now clearly more fully supported in the Sydney Family Court than women, even though they are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of domestic violence.

I hope you understand the difficulty we are experiencing in reconciling these recent actions by the Family Court with the Australian Government's stated commitment to ending violence against women and children. I would be grateful if you could please grant us a meeting so that we can discuss our concerns with you in person. I can be contacted on 0402 467476.

Yours faithfully



Anna Kerr
Principal Solicitor
Feminist Legal Clinic Inc.
Organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2023.