

**Feminist Legal Clinic Inc.**

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Maryrose Portelli
Director Court Operations
Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia

By email: Maryrose.Portelli@fedcourt.gov.au

20 November 2023

Dear Ms Portelli

Women's Court Support Service – Lionel Bowen Building

We refer to your letter of 9 November 2023 which has come as something of a shock to us.

Our management committee are very surprised to hear that the space requirements of the court are so stretched that it is necessary to evict a women's domestic violence support service that has been operating in the Sydney Family Court since 2007.

An independent evaluation of the service by the University of Sydney in 2011 concluded that "*they should have this in every court.*" Indeed, the Family Court expressed its strong support for the service as recently as 2018 when we were faced with the threat of defunding by the then Liberal Government.


Unlike Legal Aid NSW, our service is operated exclusively by and for women and is guided by a feminist framework. The CEDAW Committee has specifically recommended that Australia allocate adequate resources to ensure the availability of women-only and women-led support services for victims of gender-based violence.

Admittedly the loss of funding from June 2019 has been a devastating blow and has impacted on the quality of the service we have been able to provide with just a staff of volunteers and no employed co-ordinator. Nevertheless, we have received no complaints and no notice of any dissatisfaction with the service provided. Due to the impact of COVID, a lot of our support to women has necessarily been provided remotely via telephone and email.

In view of all this, we would ask that the Court reconsiders what would appear to be a hasty decision without thorough consideration of how our autonomous women's service can continue to be accommodated. Can the Court at least provide an assurance that they will still support our service by continuing to redirect the existing phone number, advertising our existence on the Court's website and allowing ongoing use of the court security passes?

I look forward to your early reply. My number is 0402 467476 if needed.

Yours faithfully



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