



Women's Domestic Violence
Court Advocacy Service Network Inc

Media Release

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Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services support changes to the Evidence Act to help women access justice

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc (WDVCAS NSW) supports changes to the Evidence Act which would allow domestic violence evidence kits to be used in court. Crucial evidence is gathered by police at the scene of domestic violence incidents, but as it stands, the Evidence Act doesn't allow that evidence to be shown to the court.

"Video evidence could assist women in the courts in many ways. Often women are in great fear about giving their evidence in the courts because of the threats they have received, the fear of reprisals or because of the fact that he is in court with his friends and relatives. This can be very intimidating", says WDVCAS NSW Chair, Tanya Whitehouse. WDVCASs have provided support to women in the courts for over 18 years, and "we've seen women not recognised as credible witnesses because they are anxious, or feel they will not be believed, especially when it is his word against hers", says Tanya Whitehouse.

WDVCAS NSW acknowledges the complexity of the issue and notes that some women may not be able to give a full statement of what happened to the police at the time of the incident due to their distress, injuries or hospitalisation. However WDVCAS NSW believes that video and photographic evidence taken at the time of the incident by police could assist the court in many cases. "Evidence kits could be what the court needs to convict a perpetrator of violence, and the barrier that the police currently face in not being able to submit them to court without a statement does impact in some cases. WDVCASs are able to support victims at court for these cases and work alongside the police in ensuring victim safety", says Tanya Whitehouse.

WDVCASs are also committed to working with women in terms of safety plans, access to ongoing support and through reinforcing the importance of reporting any Apprehended Domestic Violence Order breaches.

WDVCAS NSW acknowledges the NSW government's commitment to improving evidence collection and the use of video and photographic evidence in its *Domestic Violence Justice Strategy*. "However we urge the government to take steps on this matter in support of women who have the courage to go to the courts to secure their safety and the safety of their children", says WDVCAS NSW Executive Officer, Helen Brereton.

About WDVCAS NSW

WDVCAS NSW Inc is the peak body for women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence who require legal protection from the courts. WDVCAS NSW is an incorporated association comprising representatives from 28 individual WDVCASs that operate in 112 local courts throughout metropolitan, regional and rural New South Wales. In 2011/2012, the 28 WDVCAS provided 76,473 services to 27,526 clients across NSW. WDVCASs made a total of 44,642 referrals, and assisted 3,168 Aboriginal clients and 5,123 culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) clients. WDVCAS NSW Inc is funded by Legal Aid NSW through the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program.

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