



MEDIA RELEASE

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Court Merger Will be a Disaster for Mallee Families

Mallee Family Care says a decision by the Federal Parliament to merge the specialist Family Court with the Federal Circuit Court will have a devastating impact on families and does nothing to address the underlying reasons for the failings of the Family Law system.

On Thursday February 18th, legislation was passed that will abolish the Family Court of Australia and see it merged with the Federal Circuit Court – a Court that currently deals with a range of general federal law issues, including migration, human rights and employment.

The Federal Government made this announcement whilst the Australian Law Reform Commission is midway through a comprehensive review of the Australian Family Law System and prior to the appointment of a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Family Law System, something Mallee Family Care Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Teresa Jayet describes as ‘deeply concerning’.

“The Government has chosen to blindly pursue this merger without any valid evidence to support it.”

While Ms. Jayet agrees that reform is needed, she says the merger will only serve to further burden and disadvantage the vulnerable people engaged in the System. She is particularly concerned about the impact the merger will have on the length of proceedings in regional Australia.

“In Mildura, we only have three sittings of the Federal Circuit Court each year and these changes, which will see matters drawn out over a longer period, come at a time when we are seeing significant increases in the number of families engaging with the Family Law System.

“Our Community Legal Centre alone has seen a 44% increase in family law enquiries since September, when the Coronavirus restrictions began to ease in Victoria, compared to the same time last year.”

With the increasing demand and the complexity of matters, Ms. Jayet believes the Federal Government needs to immediately invest in the Family Law system, to ensure it is better resourced, while allowing time for the thorough consideration of the recommendations that will arise from the Australian Law Reform Commission’s review and Parliamentary Inquiry.

“The Government must listen to the voices of those within the legal system, who’ve led the response to family violence and who’ve unequivocally spoken out against the merger.”

ENDS



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