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For the attention of the Finance and Public Administration References Committee,

We write with regard to the *Inquiry into Domestic Violence and Gender Inequality*. As academics who research in the fields of domestic violence and animal abuse, we are currently completing work on a survey focused on experiences of domestic violence and animal abuse amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. In this submission we first provide preliminary findings from this survey, before then considering what the findings suggest with regard to the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

The survey has been live since mid January 2016, and thus far 414 people have completed it. Of these respondents 229 live in the United Kingdom and 185 live in Australia. Of the overall sample 55% indicated that they are female, 35% that they are male, and 10% indicated a non-binary gender. Of the overall sample 20% identified as transgender. In terms of sexual orientation, 33% of the overall sample identified as lesbian, 21% as gay, 21% as bisexual, 13% as heterosexual, and 12% identified as pansexual. Over 70% of the overall sample reported that they lived with companion animals.

In terms of experiences of violence or abuse, 42% indicated that they had never experienced any form of abuse from either a partner or family member. Of those who had experienced abuse, 75% had experienced emotional abuse, 45% had experienced physical abuse, 28% had experienced sexual abuse, 18% had experienced financial abuse, and 34% had experienced abuse specific to their LGBT identity. In terms of animal companions, 13% of those participants who had experienced abuse also reported that emotional abuse of animals had occurred, and 6% reported that physical abuse of animals had occurred. Importantly, for those who had witnessed the abuse of a companion animal, many reported that this then prevented them leaving the violent or abusive situation as they feared for the safety of the animal.

The survey also included a measure of mental health (the K10), and preliminary statistical analysis of the data indicates that those who had experienced abuse in any form reported poorer mental health when compared to those who had not experienced abuse. Further, no statistically significant gender differences were identified in terms of experiences of abuse. The only significant difference at the sample level pertained to abuse specific to an individual's LGBT identity, with transgender people statistically more likely to report having experienced this form of abuse.

In terms of help seeking, 62% of those who had experienced emotional abuse had sought help, 41% of those who had experienced physical abuse had sought help, 49% of those who had experienced sexual abuse had sought help, 39% of those who had experienced financial abuse had sought help, and 38% of those who had experienced abuse specific to their LGBT identity had sought help. Of those who had sought help, 85% indicated that the help they received was useful. Of those who did not find the help they received helpful, concerns were noted about lack of awareness amongst service providers in terms of domestic violence in LGBT relationships, obvious discomfort in providing services to people in LGBT relationships on the part of service providers, and a lack of understanding from police.

*These preliminary findings suggest a number of key recommendations:*

### **1) The role of gender inequality in all spheres of life in contributing to the prevalence of domestic violence**

Our preliminary findings suggest that sexual inequality continues to increase the risk of abuse. However, amongst LGBT people gender inequality may play less of a role in regards to abuse as compared to the general population. This is not to suggest that gender inequality does not exist within LGBT communities, but rather that prevalence rates of domestic violence and animal abuse within LGBT relationships may be dependent upon other factors. The non-significant findings with regards to gender differences in terms of experiences of abuse would suggest that whilst gender inequality should remain a focus in domestic violence campaigns, additional strategies are required in order to ensure the full inclusion of LGBT people.

### **2) the role of gender stereotypes in contributing to cultural conditions which support domestic violence**

Gender stereotypes allow domestic abuse to flourish and affect LGBT populations negatively. The prevalence of abuse amongst our overall sample suggests that whilst domestic violence and animal abuse within LGBT relationships remains a largely unrecognised phenomenon, both forms of abuse within such relationships do indeed occur. Heteronormative stereotypes about domestic violence as being contingent upon gender differences may in part contribute to the lack of attention to domestic violence within LGBT relationships. Conversely, stereotypes about transgender people – specifically that transgender people are deviant, violent, and/or dangerous or a risk to others – may constitute the cultural conditions that lead to the higher rates of LGBT identity related abuse experienced by the transgender participants in our sample. They may also play an important part in preventing appropriate help-seeking behaviour within this cohort.

Needed are targeted strategies that acknowledge and speak to violence within LGBT people's relationships. This may include acknowledging that violence and abuse may occur absent of gender differences, that gender differences may well exist within LGBT relationships, and that stereotypes about transgender people within the media must be challenged through guidelines that mandate and enforce appropriate ways of reporting on the lives of transgender people.

### **3) the role of government initiatives at every level in addressing the underlying causes of domestic violence**

In regards to all forms of abuse other than emotional abuse, less than half of those who had experienced abuse had sought help. Whilst the majority of those who had sought help had found it useful, the accounts given by those who had not found it helpful shed light on potential barriers. Specifically, a lack of awareness on the part of service providers may serve as barriers to accessing support.

As part of the project we are currently running, we have designed, run, and assessed a workshop aimed at increasing competency amongst domestic violence service providers for working with transgender women. On measures of both attitudes towards transgender women, and comfort and confidence in working with transgender women, all showed significant improvement following attendance at the workshop. Importantly, all attendees also showed a marked improvement in awareness about referrals available to transgender women who live with companion animals. Our findings with regard to the workshop suggest the importance of service providers being able to access ongoing training specific to work with LGBT people.

With regard to companion animals, only two states in Australia currently offer services that provide accommodation to animals in the context of domestic violence. This is despite strong evidence demonstrating that upward of 50% of those in violent relationships where there is a companion animal significantly delay leaving or remain in such relationships out of concern for their animals' wellbeing. Neither of the existing services specifically address LGBT people. Lacking, then, are both services that offer accommodation to animals, and any attention to LGBT people as potential service users. Greater funding for animal accommodation and greater awareness that LGBT people may be potential service users in addition to outreach to LGBT communities to encourage awareness of services would appear important.

In sum, our research findings to date suggest that a lack of attention to domestic violence and animal abuse with regard to LGBT people is likely to fail a significant number of people (and their animals). Our findings suggest that, at least to a certain extent, specific strategies may be needed to ensure that LGBT people are addressed within services. Targeted training for service providers, increased availability of services, and outreach programmes to raise awareness within LGBT communities all appear warranted. We are happy to answer any questions the committee may have on notice.

Yours Sincerely,

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