

SUBMISSION ON PAID DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEAVE

I represent the Australian Hairdressing Council and am also a small business owner of 39 years.

The Australian Hairdressing Council (AHC) is the peak national body representing the professional hairdressing industry and my position is CEO. The Hairdressing industry has 12,372 salons employing 37,027 hairdressers and 30,771 Sole Traders. 85% of our industry are female hairdressers and 94% of our clients are female. 64% of our industry businesses turnover less than \$300,000.

The AHC supports the 10 days paid Domestic Violence Leave. However, this leave should be nationally funded by the Government, for the following reasons.

Small business owners should not be forced to be a participant in domestic violence claims. Victims of domestic violence want privacy and rarely want the workplace involved into their personal affairs. This can place them in a vulnerable position with their work colleagues as their very personal business becomes public knowledge. Business owners do not have the skills to nurture and advise their staff who are victims, nor do they understand how to advise an entire team on how to support a victim of domestic violence. This puts great mental stress on a business owner who is forced to carry the weight of not knowing the best way to support a staff member. They do not have the contacts for appropriate organisations for support and counselling. This should not be their responsibility.

All businesses and employees pay tax. DVL should be paid by the Government and the advice and support should come from counsellors or support teams recommended by the Government who are knowledgeable of the best support available. Domestic violence is physical, emotional, financial, and sexual. How can a business owner direct their employee to the right organisation to help them without knowing all the facts? This information that may be shared with them is very personal, and again a stress that the business owner should not need to wear. Domestic violence victims need to share their circumstances with a third party who is not involved with them personally or in the workplace.

How will Paid Domestic Violence Leave be recorded on a payslip? Doesn't this mean there will be no privacy for the victim as well? Accountants and bookkeepers will have access to who is making these claims. When applying for a house to rent, proof of wages with payslips will show DVL. Who will an agent choose when others are registering interest to rent a home? Discrimination will not be admitted, but will happen. Again, this lets the victim down.

It could be argued that the business owner does not need to know all the "facts". Therefore, what assurance does the business owner have when a claim is made? Do they just pay the claim and dismiss any consultation or proof with the employee? This all is very complex. Placing Domestic Violence Leave in the workplace also fails everyone's needs.

All business owners are struggling to make ends meet, especially with an all industries experiencing skills shortages, including hairdressing. Paying 10 days DVL is not the only cost when an employee is off work. In our industry when a stylist is off work, clients will cancel their appointments and so there will also be lost income. To accommodate clients who keep their bookings, this means another staff member will need to cover their hours, which is at an overtime rate. So, this means paying out DVL, paying overtime plus loss of productivity and income.

Our industry has 30,771 Sole Traders. Why are they not considered? Do their lives not matter? What about the 12,372 business owners? Do they not matter?

At the end of 2021 there were 707,971 Sole Traders in Australia and another 20,402 Sole Traders registered. Do they not matter? At the end of 2021, 277,674 small businesses closed down. Running a small business is hard and the mental and financial stress recovering from the last 2 1/2 years of natural disasters and the pandemic is real. Everyone deserves the right to claim the paid leave from one Government department, being Centrelink. Domestic Violence Leave should follow the same process as Paid Parental Leave.

The hairdressing industry is now made up of 70% Sole Traders. Small business owners are finding it harder and harder and more expensive to employ a team. Our salons are closing due to increased running costs and the expense and stress of employing staff. Paid Domestic Violence Leave will contribute to less employment, more Sole Traders and businesses will close.

Programs such as Safer Pathway make sense as the place to provide information and support to a DV victim, not the employer.

<https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/justice/safer-pathway.html>

I also note that part of the Union's and Government justification is that DVL costs to a small business will be minimal based on previous reports from the academics. Yet, the Human Rights Commission states "Almost two thirds of women affected by domestic and family violence in Australia are employed". Yet, only 0.3% or under is reported to an employer. Does this not clearly show that the business owner is not the individual who should be involved in their very personal circumstances?

As a small business owner we already support and accommodate our staff with training costs and cover so many entitlements and this seems to be overlooked with the paid DVL proposal. Annual leave, personal leave, mental health leave, compassionate leave, public holidays, superannuation, jury duty leave, parental leave, long service leave and often community service leave. In a recent survey with our business owners it was noted that most staff exhaust their personal leave, whereas business owners take very little if any time off sick. Is this how paid DVL would also work? We are small businesses with little or zero profits, not big businesses with big profits. Our business is our livelihood and we ask that you understand the financial and mental pressure under which we operate - daily.

To summarise, the proposed Domestic Violence Leave paid by employers let the victims down, let small business owners down and neither party are protected or supported. This proposal fails us all.

Isn't the intent to support victims of domestic violence? Don't they need confidential financial and emotional support? This is not the responsibility of a business owner. The introduction of Paid Domestic Violence Leave, paid by the employer and managed by the employer, is a failure of the Government to take social responsibility of our communities.