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Kia Ora Prime Minister John Key.

The Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children is a coalition of 12 agencies who are concerned about the prevention of domestic and sexual violence. For more information about us please see the end of the letter.

Over the past four years the National Party have introduced a number of legislative and policy changes that singularly and together, discriminate against women. We are not sure if this is the intended outcome of these reforms, but we are concerned about this and would like your response. We understand that you may need to confer with other Ministers, but would like to hear from you as Prime Minister please.

We are specifically concerned about legislation and policy that affects women's ability to live lives that are free from abuse. This includes legislation that has unintended negative consequences for women.

**Legislation and policy changes that specifically impact on women's safety:**

Domestic violence and criminal justice:

- Gender neutral language to describe men's violence against women

- The White Paper, the risk assessment tool and the focus on already damaged families rather than support for good parenting. The absence of any mention of domestic or sexual violence in the White Paper
- Changes to police reporting of domestic violence that was implanted without consultation with MSD, or any agency in the community sector.
- Changes to the Family Court that impact on women's ability to leave abusive relationships because of the lack of processes that prioritise women and children's safety. This includes:
  - the focus on dispute resolution and couple work without any provisions for screening for domestic violence
  - the excessive costs of using the court that will exclude women attempting to leave violent relationships and poor women
  - the inability to be represented by a lawyer and to get legal aid when applying for a parenting order, except when the order is without notice
- The changes to Housing NZ including the merger with the Department of Building and Housing, the loss of case managers and face to face contact, the restriction on the provision of social housing policy to government and other changes which seriously diminish the function of the organisation to provide social housing to women needing to leave violent relationships. Also, Women's Refuge has been told that domestic violence is no longer a priority for the allocation of housing and Housing NZ now make women who hold the tenancy liable for damage done by an ex-partner.
- Decreased funding to sexual and family violence services, including loss of funding to sexual violence support services resulting in (nation wide) 1/3 cutting staff or hours.
- The changes to Legal Aid which make it much more difficult for women to get legal aid and therefore have access to justice
- The Crimes Amendment Act which has the capacity to further abuse and punish women who are living in a violent relationship and, as a consequence of living with sexual and domestic violence, are unable to protect themselves and their children, by criminalising them for this failure.
- The changes to the Taskforce on Family Violence, which downgrades the taskforce from chief executives to less senior representatives with lesser decision

making/spending powers

- The changes to the Solicitor General's guidelines for prosecution, 2010, which increased the threshold for evidence for crimes to be prosecuted. This means that in cases where it is he says/she says (domestic and sexual violence) the prosecutor is less likely to go forward with the case. We are certain this is a major reason for the decrease in domestic violence prosecutions in the last 2 years, especially in Auckland.
- The downgrading of the Family Violence Unit in the Ministry of Social Development
- Changes to/cutting of, funding for prevention and health promotion in all areas including family and sexual violence. This includes a loss of funding and Ministerial support for public health approaches, which are leading the Domestic Violence response internationally.
- The Child and Family Protection Bill which means when Protection Orders are granted there is now a requirement for the case to return to court within 2 weeks for a contact/care decision to be made...this can put abused women and their children at serious risk of on-going abuse as it provides the abuser access to his victims and power over their lives via access/contact requirements

#### Women's Affairs

- Putting the Women's Affairs Minister outside of cabinet
- The decision that we don't need a women's agenda - and that the public service targets will be enough
- Loss of positions from Women's Affairs

#### Welfare reforms

- All of the changes to the provision of welfare that disproportionately discriminate against women and children and further impoverish and marginalise sole parents, including changes that prioritise paid work over parenting
- The regulation of women's fertility via the domestic purposes benefit
- The Bill to change provisions for child support payments to custodial parents including shared care measured as two nights a week and less sanctions for non

payment

- Changes to the Families Commission (no longer an advocate for families, less resources, directed by government policy)

Other things

- Privacy breaches, combined with increased information sharing, without increased resourcing for the Privacy Commissioner.
- Cuts to Community Law services especially the specialised services such as disability and youth

**Legislation and policy that discriminates against women or harms women's ability to participate fully in the community**

- The cuts to the community education budget. This was often women's entry into adult education, employment and decreasing social isolation
- The cutting of the subsidy for women on the DPB to engage in tertiary studies
- The focus on "front line services" with the consequent loss of jobs and expertise
- All of the cuts in services that traditionally employ women – for example, health, education and the social services
- The closing of the pay equity unit
- The changes to employment law that disadvantage employees - youth rates, 90 day employment trials, reduction in collective bargaining power, combined with an increased number of people in the job market due to welfare reforms. This is all contributing to a more precarious, less flexible, work environment in which it's much harder for lower skilled workers to improve their conditions.
- Changes to the Mental Health Commission and the development of the Health

## Promotion Agency

- Increases in medical and prescription fees
- Changes to eligibility to home care for older/disabled people, changes to eligibility to disabled driver parking cards
- The focus on front line services with the subsequent loss of jobs and expertise
- Local government changes that impact on the provision of funding and support for women's organisations and violence prevention initiatives
- Cuts to funding for women's organisations – and the consequent loss of services for women and children
- Cuts to educational support for disabled children in main-stream schools
- Cuts to all public sector staffing and spending, including less research and policy advice – this means that government policy is based on Ministers wishes rather than evidence and best practice

### **We are also interested in what you have to say about:**

- The full implementation of the Ministry of Justice Report Te Toiora Mata Tauherenga, Report of the Taskforce on Sexual Violence, 2009
- Addressing the issues raised in the Human Rights Commission report on employment in rest homes “Caring Counts”
- The issues raised in the latest CEDAW report

- Full implementation of the Domestic Violence Act
- Implementation of the ruling from Surrey verses Surrey about the provision of protection orders

Thank you. We are looking forward to a response from you.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Hager

on behalf of the Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children.

We are a coalition of Auckland organisations that work on the prevention of violence towards women and children.

Coalition members:

- Auckland Sexual Abuse HELP
- Auckland Women's Centre
- Homeworks Trust
- Inner City Women's Group
- Mental Health Foundation
- Mt Albert Psychological Services Ltd
- Rape Prevention Education – Whakatu Mauri
- SHINE Safer Homes in NZ Everyday
- Supportline Women's Refuge
- Te Rito Rodney
- Women's Health Action Trust

Organisations that work in parallel with us are Tu Wahine, which provides services for Maori, and the NGO Alliance, a collective of national agencies including Jigsaw, the National Network of Stopping Violence Services and the National Network of Independent Women's Refuges.