

Opposition to the Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test) Bill 2021

The Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test) Bill 2021 (**the Bill**) passed the House of Representatives on 16 February 2022 and may come before the Senate on 29 and 30 March 2022.

The undersigned organisations, all of whom work with victim-survivors of family violence, strongly oppose the passage of the Bill on the basis that **it unintentionally endangers victim-survivors of family violence, particularly women and children.**

The Bill is inconsistent with national efforts to eradicate family violence and is apt to undermine those efforts.

In particular, the Bill may have the following consequences:

- Increasing the risk of detention and deportation for victim-survivors who are misidentified as perpetrators of family violence.
- Placing victim-survivors of family violence at risk of losing their dependent visa status and support, leading to serious consequences including homelessness, family separation, detention and deportation.
- Undermining early-intervention initiatives by deterring victim-survivors from seeking assistance when facing family violence.
- Leading to the further weaponisation of visa status by perpetrators, including through misreporting and coercive behaviours.
- Failing to give appropriate weight to the views of victim-survivors of family violence in visa cancellation or refusal process.

The Fourth National Plan recognises that migrant and refugee women may face different and complex forms of violence, as well as additional barriers to accessing support, and recommends community-led and tailored initiatives to address the unique experiences and needs of communities affected by multiple forms of discrimination or inequality. We welcome consultation on appropriate ways the Australian migration and refugee system can protect women and children from family violence.

This Bill should not be passed.

Signed:

- ARC Justice
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
- Barwon Community Legal Service
- Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria
- Fitzroy Legal Service
- Gippsland Community Legal Centre
- Inner Melbourne Community Legal
- InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
- Northern Community Legal Centre
- Peninsula Community Legal Centre
- Sisters Inside
- South-East Monash Legal Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- West Heidelberg Community Legal
- West Justice
- Women's Legal Service NSW
- Women's Legal Service Victoria

