

Media Release – For immediate release 20 November 2019

Sector welcomes important reforms to tenancy laws to further protect victims-survivors of domestic violence

We welcome the passing today of important legislation to improve the safety of domestic violence victims-survivors renting in NSW. Today's Bill strengthens reforms which commenced in February this year which allow victims-survivors of domestic violence to end their tenancy immediately without penalty.

Today's welcome reforms expand the list of "competent person" providing evidence of domestic violence which is an important step to further protecting victims of domestic and family violence and to ensuring their immediate and urgent safety.

"The expanded list helps removes barriers to victims' safety and security because it allows a victim-survivor to be better supported by a wider range of service providers" said Joanne Yates, CEO of Domestic Violence NSW.

"It is important that people from a range of professions working with victims-survivors of domestic violence can provide evidence of domestic violence," says Liz Snell, Law Reform and Policy Co-ordinator, Women's Legal Service NSW. "These reforms are a significant improvement which we warmly welcome. However, it is vital these protections can be accessed by all who need them, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant and refugee communities, people with disability, LGBTQ communities and people living in regional, rural and remote areas. We will continue to work with Government to ensure these protections can be accessed by those who most need them," says Ms Snell.

"We welcome the expansion of the list of people who can provide evidence of domestic violence to end a tenancy early in circumstances of domestic violence. However, people with disability face significant barriers to accessing some of the people named in the expanded list. We would therefore encourage the inclusion of independent disability advocates," says Dr Meg Clement-Couzner, Senior Policy Officer, People with Disability Australia.

"We commend all sides of politics for acknowledging the need for reform to protect victims-survivors of domestic violence who rent in NSW and working together to make these important reforms happen," says Leo Patterson Ross, Senior Policy Officer, Tenants' Union of NSW.

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Background information

The Government introduced important reforms to strengthen protections for victims-survivors of domestic violence which commenced in February this year. The reforms included allowing victims-survivors of domestic violence to end their tenancy immediately without penalty, by giving a notice of termination, attaching a copy of a domestic violence (protection) order, a family law injunction, a record of conviction or a declaration from a 'competent person', defined to include only medical practitioners.

Legislation has been passed today to expand the list of 'competent person' who can provide a declaration.

The list of 'competent person' has been expanded to include a broader range of health practitioners, registered social workers, an employee of a government agency that provides child welfare services, an employee of a non-government agency receiving government funding to provide services relating to domestic violence or sexual assault, or refuge or emergency accommodation, a counsellor approved under the Victims Support Scheme, or a person prescribed by future regulations.