

Media Release

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Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

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MAKING IT EASIER FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS TO REPORT VIOLENCE

The Allan Labor Government is making it easier for victim-survivors' to report crimes including sexual harassment and assault, and making sure body-worn camera evidence can be used in family violence matters.

Introduced into Parliament today, the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024* will remove barriers that some victim-survivors face in coming forward and will include other improvements to modernise Victoria's justice and integrity system.

The current defamation laws can have a chilling effect on reporting sexual abuse or harassment, with some victim-survivors not reporting the crime due to fear of being subjected to potential defamation proceedings.

The Bill will extend the defence of absolute privilege to reports made to police. This will protect all Victorians, including victim-survivors, who make a report to police, granting them complete immunity if their alleged perpetrator tries to bring a defamation suit against them.

This reform continues the Government's work to remove barriers on reporting crime and improves the way the justice system responds to serious offences, especially for sexual and family violence matters.

Victoria's defamation laws will also be strengthened to respond to the ever-evolving online landscape. The Bill will clarify the liability and responsibility of digital intermediaries like search engines and social media platforms when a third-party uses their online service to publish defamatory content.

The reforms will also ensure police-issued body worn camera footage can continue to be used as evidence in court cases involving a family violence offence or family violence intervention order. This evidence can replace the need for victims to make a formal written statement, but victims will still be able to provide one if they wish.

This form of evidence has been trialled following the *Royal Commission into Family Violence* – and has allowed victim-survivors to provide a statement in their own words immediately following an incident, reducing the burden on frontline police and better holding perpetrators to account.

Changes to integrity and justice legislation will also ensure our agencies have what they need to do their important jobs more effectively. The Victorian Inspectorate will be renamed Integrity Oversight Victoria, led by the Chief Integrity Inspector to better reflect the important role this office has overseeing Victoria's integrity agencies.

The Bill will provide the Chief Statistician with better access to court data to support more accurate reporting on criminal justice issues and trends, complementing existing access to Victoria Police data.

The reforms also make it clear that electronic signatures are valid in criminal proceedings, reducing uncertainty around what signatures are admissible.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"We know how hard it can be for victim-survivors to report what happened to them – these reforms remove some of the barriers they face in their bravery by coming forward."

"With these changes, we're making sure our justice system responds better to serious offending like family violence and sexual assault and is more accessible to all Victorians."

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