



Submission on the Domestic Violence - Victims' Protection Bill

From Shine (Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday)

April 2017

Prepared by Holly Carrington, Communications Manager

Shine

Shine – Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday – was founded in 1990 and is a leading New Zealand domestic abuse specialist service provider. Every year, Shine supports thousands of adult and child victims of domestic abuse to become safe, motivates hundreds of perpetrators to change, and trains more than 1,000 professionals on how to recognise domestic violence, respond and refer to specialists. Since July 2016, Shine has been a service division of Presbyterian Support Northern, one of New Zealand’s largest social service providers. Shine Services include:

- Shine’s national Helpline (0508-744-633)
- Victim advocacy and safety planning
- Two women’s refuges in Auckland central and North Shore
- KIDshine, a crisis service for children who witness domestic violence
- No Excuses men’s stopping violence programme
- A range of professional training programmes delivered throughout NZ
- DVFREE, a programme that helps employers create safe and supportive workplaces for staff experiencing domestic violence: www.2shine.org.nz/dvfree-workplace-programme
- Policy consultation and research

Shine’s expertise on domestic abuse is based on knowledge gleaned from our direct and daily interaction with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, keeping up with current research in the field and researching specialist models in New Zealand and overseas.

More about Shine: www.2shine.org.nz

Submission

We are writing to strongly support passage of Green MP Jan Logie's Domestic Violence - Victims’ Protection Bill which will allow victims of domestic violence in employment to take paid leave if needed.

Passing this law and requiring businesses to allow up to ten days a year special leave for victims of domestic violence would:

1. Allow victims of domestic violence in crisis the right to paid time off from work to attend to urgent issues such as visiting a lawyer, relocating, attending court and meeting with a specialist advocate for safety planning assistance.
2. Send a strong message to employers that domestic violence is a major issue they have a responsibility to address as it affects their workforce and impacts seriously on the health and safety of their employees.

3. Send a strong message to victims of domestic violence that the Government is prioritising ensuring adequate support for victims of domestic violence who are working so they can remain employed.

Family violence is one of New Zealand's biggest human right issues. One in three New Zealand women is physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner in their lifetime. But this is not just an issue that affects only women. Men are sometimes victims too. Rates of intimate partner violence in LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer) couples are similar to those in heterosexual couples.

For many domestic abuse victims, employment provides critical networks and financial support that can be their path to safety. Having this special leave provision enshrined in law will be a minimal cost to employers that will potentially have a major impact on those who need it most, allowing them to remain employed – a win-win for the employee and the employer.

Anecdotally, Shine Advocates have heard from countless victims we've worked with over the years about their struggles to stay employed while being in an abusive relationship. Some of these victims have received amazing support from their employers which not only ensured they could remain employed, but also helped them to become and/or stay safe and feel supported during their time of crisis. However, many more victims have expressed fears about disclosing their experience of abuse to their employers. These included fears of not being believed, fears of having their experiences minimised or ignored, fears of being judged negatively and having adverse employment opportunities as a result, and fears that their disclosures would put them in greater danger.

In our experience, victims do not usually disclose to their employer which leads to lower productivity and higher absenteeism. We've heard stories of victims being fired for behaviour directly related to their experience of abuse, or having to leave a job to try to avoid their abuser finding them. Having support from their employer, and in particular time off when they most needed it, would have made a critical difference to many of these victims. With employer support, victims are more likely to address safety issues more quickly and effectively, remain employed, leave an abusive partner and remain separated, independent and independent.

It is also important to note that most victims who are at high risk of serious injury are mothers with young children. Passing a law that helps women in these situations will also help their children to avoid further trauma, and to be living in a safe, stable environment more quickly.

Cost of the status quo versus passing this bill

A similar law exists in many Australian states. Research by Jim Stanford, Ph.D. of Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute (December 2016) shows that the status quo is not 'free'. The cost of domestic violence to employers includes lost work time, (even if unpaid) reduced productivity, higher turnover and resulting recruitment and training costs and risks of violence spilling over into the workplace as well as reputational risks with customers and

other employees. Domestic violence appears to cost about one percent of gross domestic product every year.

New Zealand research commissioned by the PSA - 'Productivity gains from workplace protection of victims of domestic violence' (Kahui, Ku, Snively, 2014) showed that domestic violence costs NZ employers \$368 million annually due to lost productivity.

Stanford's research also found in Australia, that:

- The costs of providing 10 days' special domestic violence-related leave a year are negligible.
- 15% of all paid employees in Australia (1.6 million workers) already have paid leave for domestic violence.
- Concerns that victims might abuse extra leave offered were unjustified; most victims are reluctant to use services available to them: they need encouragement to use them; and average leave periods were rarely reported to be longer than a week.
- Opposition to the leave proposals wrongly assumed a high rate of utilisation - that 25% of all women and 10% of all men would use the entire 10 days every year; in fact, the utilisation rate of domestic violence paid leave in Australia where available is 0.022% - 0.31%. But for the small number of people who do use this leave, it may make a major difference in helping them to remain employed while going through a crisis.
- Between one quarter and one fifth of female victims take paid leave when available; male victims are half as likely to take leave as female victims.
- Benefits to employers of paid domestic violence leave include reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, improved productivity, and reduced incidence of violence.
- Costs of replacing a single employee, including advertising, interviewing, hiring, training and ramping up, are estimated at \$20,000.