

2 July 2020

All Members of Parliament  
Freepost Parliament  
Private Bag 18 888  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160

Hon Member of Parliament

Aviva was saddened to hear the Sexual Violence Legislation Bill has not progressed to its second reading in parliament due to the criticism of a few lobbyists. As an organization working to combat the effects and trauma of sexual violence, we urge you to reconsider the positive impact this bill would have for those who have experienced sexual harm.

Aviva is a family and sexual violence support agency located in Canterbury. Our Sexual Assault Support Service Canterbury (SASSC) team operates the only 24/7 sexual assault support hotline in the region. We have been supporting the people in your electorate who have experienced sexual violence for the past six years, through medical examinations, police reporting, the legal system, and in overcoming the effects of their trauma.

As it currently stands, the New Zealand justice system's handling of sexual violence cases only serves to re-traumatise those we support and further distance them from the reporting process while providing little to no actual recourse for the harm they have endured. The Law Commission's investigation into the justice system found this to be true with the majority of those who have gone through the court system saying it was so awful they would not report if they were to experience sexual violence again. Furthermore, they would not encourage others who have experienced sexual violence to report.

Our support workers struggle day in and day out to emotionally support our clients through the legal system – to help them gain the confidence to testify in court and confront the injustice done to them. We know the importance of reporting these crimes but are also fully aware of the way in which that system causes further harm to those we support and inhibits their journeys toward wellbeing.

There is a clear distrust of the New Zealand justice system. This bill offers the opportunity to change the narrative and give our clients – your constituents – confidence in the system to support them through allegations of sexual violence, by allowing them to feel safe and protected within the court system.

Other countries including the UK, Australia, and Canada have already adopted these proposed changes, which have shown no negative impact to fair trials, but a profound positive impact for the complainants.



the loft

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If we do not address the existing problems within our justice system and its re-traumatisation of those who go through it, we cannot expect to address the issue of sexual violence in this country. Without a change such as the ones proposed in this bill, people will continue to feel unsafe testifying and the low reporting rates for sexual violence will remain unchanged, while those committing sexual violence will continue to evade justice and essentially be given permission to continue causing sexual harm. Without your intervention the cycle of violence will continue.

Please support the Sexual Violence Legislation Bill through parliament, so no one else need suffer under the existing system and so that we may start to properly address the issue of sexual violence in this country.

Sincerely,

Gwenda Kendrew  
General Manager – Operations

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