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MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIA'S SHAME: FAMILY LAW REFORM IS LONG OVERDUE

Independent MLC Ann Bressington today slammed government inaction to address the thousands of cases where children have had one of their parents vilified and removed from their lives by Family Law Courts and their practitioners.

“The money-driven destruction of the relationship between a child and one of its parents under our legal system affects everyone: parents, children, grandparents, friends and family”, Ms Bressington said.

“Nobody wins here. Parents suffer financially and emotionally and children lose the love, guidance and a meaningful relationship with a parent. Single parent children are seriously over-represented on indicators of depression, drug addiction, teen pregnancy, serious crime, academic failure and suicide”.

Ms Bressington said Family Law reform to promote the welfare of children was long overdue. Fathers are coming forward with their concerns about the lack of family preservation initiatives being applied and their views on the failure of shared parenting.

“The majority of distress experienced by a victim parent is associated with not seeing their children and being undermined by the adversarial system. The trauma of knowing your children are suffering and that any attempt to see them can so easily be presented as “abuse” in Family Court proceedings is continuing to take its toll nationwide.

“Under the current system, many parents are driven by despair to suicide. It is a disgrace that the pain and suffering of Australians at the hands of our Family Law system continues to be overlooked by our mainstream politicians”.

Ms Bressington said there was a move to cover up the severity of mens suicide when dealing with Family Law issues.

“I have heard a lecturer at a Queensland University who received a grant for suicide research and was instructed not to touch the topic of men killing themselves after the breakdown of their family.”

Ms Bressington is proposing a solution to the terrible damage being inflicted on parents and children. She believes the situation can be improved by:

- a rebuttable presumption of shared parenting as a default position upon separation,
- a zero tolerance for false statements.
- The abolition of case law

There are numerous and compelling benefits to these reforms, including:

- preventing conflict, distress and emotional trauma of the children and parents involved in litigation.
- preventing most residency disputes from starting in the first place, because there is no aggrieved party (excluded parent) to initiate proceedings
- placing into effect Australia's stated obligations as signatories of the UN charter of children's rights to a relationship with both their parents
- enabling the best interests of children are protected by having an association with both their parents
- ensuring that children will have substantial time with both sides of their family, including grandparents for example.

Ms Bressington said there had been an overwhelming national response to her proposed "Polygraph Bill" for South Australia, and that it was time to reign in those with vested interests in undermining Australian families for their own financial gain.

"Enough is enough. The federal government must reform the Family Law Act to protect children from losing one of their parents and tearing apart Australian families."

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