Demand for open reporting of partner bashing cases as help-calls spike

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THE Queensland Law Society and advocates working with victims have backed calls for more open reporting of serious domestic violence cases where perpetrators breach orders.

The peak legal body has also defended the domestic violence courts at Southport and magistrates working at the coalface of the growing problem. At the same time, the Women's Legal

Service has reported an alarming 41 per cent spike in calls to its statewide domestic violence helpline this January, compared with last year.

QLS past president Bill Potts said it was time for laws that have domestic violence matters dealt with in closed court to change in some cases.

"I'm a firm believer of the phrase 'sunlight is the best dis-infectant'," he said. "Where people have been charged with

breaching orders, having them dealt with publicly as would happen in criminal cases is certainly something that could be considered."

In Queensland, reporting of domestic violence is the most restricted in the country, with courts automatically closed to the media unless specific permission is granted.

Mr Potts said there was a significant argument to allow the press to play its role in

alerting the public to the prevalence of domestic violence and the courts' workload.

Domestic violence support service Red Rose Foundation chief executive Betty Taylor said bail hearings in complex cases should be adjourned and dealt with by specialist teams including a magistrate. She also supported increased media reporting of domestic violence breaches.

Domestic violence legal ex-

pert Heather Douglas (pictured) of the University of Queensland said risk factors such as strangulation and use of weapons should be better recognised.

"This was a case where everyone should have been thinking this woman's life was at serious risk," she said.

Women's Legal Service coordinator Angela Lynch said the service was not able to answer half of the calls coming in for legal and welfare help.