

TOWNSVILLE


North Queensland Women's Legal Service pans controversial family court merger plan

Vulnerable women and children would be worst off under a controversial shake-up of the family courts.

MADURA MCCORMACK, Townsville Bulletin

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 Sharell O'Brien, Supervising Solicitor of the North Queensland Women's Legal Service spoke at a senate public hearing into the merger of the Family Court and Federal Circuit Court. Picture: Shae Beplate.

The North Queensland Women's Legal Service has called for the planned merger of the Family Court and Federal Circuit Court to be delayed or withdrawn, weeks away from it happening.

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But the proposed restructure has been widely panned by peak legal bodies across Australia, including the Queensland Law Society, the Law Council of Australia, and the Family Law Practitioners Association of Queensland.

Legal practitioners have slammed the Government for rushing the merger through without proper expert - consultation.

At a Senate committee public hearing in Townsville on Friday, NQWLS supervising solicitor Sharell O'Brien called for the Government to halt its plans and allow the Australian Law Reform Commission to investigate its consequences.

"In a society where a woman is killed each week due to domestic and family violence, it is of grave concern that reforms of the family court system, a system that women and children are often forced to engage in to protect their children from harm, is being rushed through without proper consultation and with an overarching purpose that does not include prioritising safety of women and children," she said.


Ms O'Brien said any restructure that happened before proper consultation would be "premature" and create "greater confusion and uncertainty".

Under the Coalition Government's plans, the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia would be split into two divisions under the leadership of one chief justice.

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Ms O'Brien said the merger of the courts could also mean fewer judges who are specialised in family law matters, resulting in poorer outcomes.

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Search  President of the Queensland Law Society, Townsville-based solicitor Ken Taylor.

Queensland Law Society president Ken Taylor said the merger would not improve the current system.

“It is a significant risk that the quality and propriety of family law decisions will be compromised where determinations are made by judicial officers without family law expertise,” he said.

“We cannot expect our judges to perform miracles; they require adequate resourcing.

“The solution is not this merger of the courts, it’s ensuring that the correct level of experience and specialisation is paired with an adequate number of judges.”

Originally published as [Controversial court shake-up to affect Townsville women and children](#)

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