

POLICE & COURTS

# WLS push for coercive control to be made a new offence to tackle DV

One of Queensland's largest domestic violence services has recommended a common behaviour for DV offenders be made a criminal offence in the wake of the shocking murders of Hannah Clarke and her three children at Camp Hill.

Alexandria Utting, Chief Court Reporter, The Courier-Mail

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ONE of Queensland's largest domestic violence services has recommended coercive control be made a criminal offence in the wake of the [shocking murders of Hannah Clarke and her three children at Camp Hill](#).

Queensland Women's Legal Service have called on the State Government to become a "national leader in responding to family violence" and have put forward a raft of suggested reforms to respond the "national domestic violence crisis". This includes an immediate review of domestic violence in the Queensland criminal justice system, including the implementation of a new offence of coercive control.

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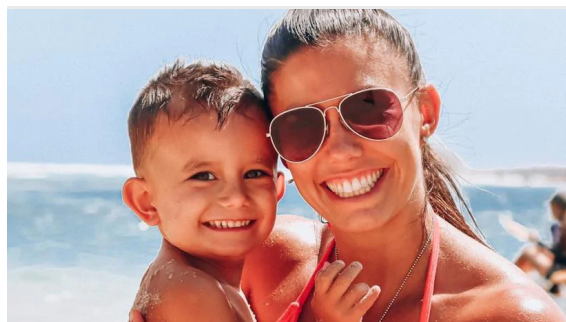
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"It has been done very successfully overseas. What it would mean would be establishing a pattern of control. When police attend they would ask questions around the history of what's been happening, not just look at an incident in isolation," WLS chief executive Angela Lynch said yesterday.



Women's Legal Services Queensland chief executive Angela Lynch (right). She is pictured with Michelle Dorendahl, the mother of Eeva, who was murdered by her father during a court-approved access period. Picture: Gary Ramage.



Hannah Clarke and her three children were murdered by her estranged husband Rowan Baxter, who set the family on fire in their car at Camp Hill last Wednesday before killing himself.

Ms Lynch said WLS is also pushing for a statewide rollout of the Queensland Police's Domestic and Family Violence Taskforce, currently operating on the Gold Coast and Logan, where officers identify and track high-risk offenders and proactively monitor them.

Ms Lynch also called for reviews into strangulation, stalking and sexual violence offences, saying stalking laws had not caught up with technology.



Red Rose Rally against domestic violence. Picture: Evan Morgan.

Her comments come after a Townsville District Court case in last year deemed there was no definition in Queensland legislation for the acts of choking, suffocation or strangulation. For a person to be found guilty of choking, suffocation or strangulation, the person must stop another from breathing, not cause a “restriction in the ability to breathe”, the case said.

“The problem with this is that it’s the compression of blood flow that is dangerous,” Ms Lynch said.



Hannah Clarke with children Aaliyah, 6 Laianah, 4 and Trey, 3. They were killed by husband and father Rowan Baxter at Camp Hill in Brisbane last week. Picture: supplied.

“It’s the terror and control, the person who is doing the act saying: ‘I can kill you if I want to’. It’s not just the act of stopping breath, it’s all those things so that’s why we want this to be looked at.”



Flowers at the scene where Hannah Clarke and her children were murdered by their father Rowan Baxter. Picture taken Saturday February 22, 2020. Picture: AAP image/John Gass.

She also called for increased funding for frontline services with the aim that calls for help don’t go unanswered.

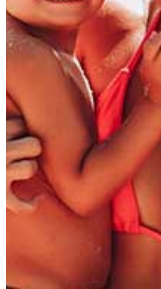
“Queensland should lead Australia in the wake of these incomprehensible murders,” Ms Lynch said.

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