



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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Bills - Second Reading Debate

10 November 2020

**Stronger Communities Legislation Amendment (Domestic
Violence) Bill 2020**

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (16:31:51):

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in debate on the Stronger Communities Legislation Amendment (Domestic Violence) Bill 2020. It is very important for our community. The past months have been challenging, not only for the Wallsend electorate but also all communities in Australia. It has been more than a challenge for domestic abuse victims and their relationships, particularly given that many of those victims have been living in isolation and have been unable to avoid their abusers. We also know that money is tighter and that people are cut off from their vital support networks. The proposed amendments to include harm to an animal in particular circumstances as part of the meaning of "intimidation" is welcomed. The amendment ensures that harm or threats of harm to much-loved animals are included within relevant offences and apprehended violence order [AVO] conditions.

We all know of examples of perpetrators who use love for an animal as a weapon to control and intimidate a victim. I have seen it in my electorate. It is used to intimidate and retaliate against victims. It is used as punishment for the victims if they choose to leave. Perpetrators use animal abuse to delay victims from leaving. Victims fear for their cherished pets who may not be protected from the perpetrators. The amendments also provide domestic violence complainants with the ability to give evidence in the safety of a closed court. The ability to give evidence in a closed court is currently available to domestic violence complainants only if the accused has been charged with a prescribed sexual offence or the complainant is a child or a cognitively impaired witness. The winner of the 2020 Stella Prize, Jess Hill, has been researching and writing about domestic abuse since 2014. She investigated these issues in her

book, *See What You Made Me Do*, which is a forensic examination of the causes and effects of domestic abuse and coercive control and the extent of the problem in our community. She says:

Domestic abuse and coercive control steals people's language away from them ... It's just not good enough to me that there are millions of people who are alive right now who have lived through domestic abuse, who are not understood by the rest of Australia ... you're talking about 2 million women who've lived through intimate-partner violence, millions of grown-up children. So the numbers on that scale are enormous.

There are important steps in this bill to allow police to vary the conditions of an apprehended domestic violence order [ADVO] provisionally in circumstances requiring an urgent response due to increased risk. There is not always time to wait for a court listing to make the order or variation to the existing conditions of the ADVO as required. The pivotal role that police perform as first responders to domestic violence incidents is well recognised. Attending domestic violence incidents is a core component of police practice. Victim-survivors with positive initial interactions with police create better reporting rates, reduced re-victimisation and an increase in overall safety, justice and wellbeing. Police responses to domestic and family violence have improved, which has increased confidence within the service system and more women report domestic violence than ever before. However, despite those improvements, domestic violence remains underreported and a proportion of victim-survivors continue to report being re-victimised by their interactions with police.

I reiterate what the member for Ballina said about resourcing for our community sector and community groups. Many of the groups in the Wallsend electorate, such as the Samaritans and the refuges, survive on the smell of an oily rag. Warlga Ngurra, a women's refuge in the area, in particular, is desperate for more staff because it is a victim of its own success. It is incredibly popular and takes in many women, particularly Aboriginal women from all over the State who are fleeing domestic violence. There are few staff to really look after those women. Today is an opportunity for me to mention in this House the importance of more funding and resources for Warlga Ngurra and other women's services. The staff do a great job. I thank all of the staff who work in this field, whether with the Samaritans or other organisations or refuges. I know they work hard with limited resources and I would love to see those resources increase. Labor acknowledges that the Government's changes are important, but there is more to do. I look forward to seeing further changes, particularly around coercive control.