

Domestic Violence–Victims’ Protection Bill

Supporting victims of domestic violence

New Zealand has the worst rate of family and intimate-partner violence in the world. Police are called to around 200 domestic violence situations a day – that’s one every five minutes on average. Clearly, we need to address domestic violence and what we can all do to help.

In early 2017, Parliament will have the opportunity to help victims of domestic violence by voting for Jan Logie’s [Domestic Violence-Victim’s Protection Bill](#).

This bill means people will no longer have to choose between escaping a violent relationship and keeping their pay check. It will protect victims of domestic violence in keeping their jobs by allowing people to take paid leave if needed. Victims can take a day off if they need to go to Women’s Refuge, go to the doctor, or to help support their kids. Abusive partners often track their victims, so time off from work to go to these appointments can provide the necessary cover for victims to create essential pathways to safety.

Domestic violence has a damaging, yet often hidden, impact on victims’ lives, such as their ability to stay in work and progress their career. Quite often work colleagues are the only ones who know or suspect that domestic violence is happening. People want to do the right thing, but don’t know what to do.

Late last year, former Prime Minister John Key said that *“It’s easy to think this [family violence] is someone else’s problem. But it is not someone else’s problem if you are a New Zealander who cares”*. This bill helps workplaces and employers show they care, and makes sure every victim gets the support they need to get themselves and their children to safety. This change could save lives. It’s really just the right thing to do.

What does Jan’s bill do?

This bill will guide employers and businesses on how they can support victims of domestic violence, for example by providing additional leave days and flexible working arrangements. It will clarify that domestic violence is a hazard in the workplace that needs to be managed by the employer like other hazards, and that it is illegal to discriminate against victims of domestic violence for being victims.

How will this bill help someone who is being abused?

Having a supportive workplace can make all the difference for someone experiencing domestic violence. When someone is escaping a violent relationship, it can be very hard to juggle work alongside court dates, counselling, finding a safe place to live, and looking after their kids.

This bill will support a victim and their children if they need to take time off work to meet up with Women’s Refuge and make a plan of how to escape. It will help victims keep their jobs when their abuser is trying to get them sacked so they become more isolated and dependent. It will also help ensure victims are safe in the workplace. Victims are most at risk of being killed six months after leaving a violent relationship. They can be particularly vulnerable at or around work, as most work is in a fixed location with fixed hours. This can make victims, who need to maintain an income, very vulnerable.

Why is this bill important?

This bill will save lives by making it easier to leave violent relationships and will help people stay in employment. People already suffering from domestic violence will be able to hold on to their job. The bill will support people on a pathway out of violence and help as they rebuild their lives.

With the [Human Rights Commission](#) currently campaigning for businesses to introduce a family violence policy, this bill would provide tangible guidance for businesses about what needs to be done to address domestic violence.

Standardised workplace policies make a clear statement that as a society we want to end domestic violence. The changes this bill will bring will have a significant role over time in preventing violence.

Won't this be expensive?

Workplaces already pick up the costs of domestic violence, so addressing those costs will make workplaces safer and more productive. Domestic violence is already costing workplaces in New Zealand at [least \\$368 million](#), through higher turnover of staff, and lowering productivity. Addressing this problem directly will be better for business and for victims of domestic violence. The immediate costs to employers associated with this are likely to be offset by benefits to employers, not to mention victims.

This will have a small initial cost to business, but will be of massive benefit for victims. [Recent research](#) from Australia suggests that only 0.02 percent of existing payrolls would be impacted by having domestic violence leave.

Who is already doing this?

In Australia, Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland have all put family and domestic violence leave provisions into their state law.

At home, employers including Countdown, The Warehouse, ANZ, the GCSB, and the University of Auckland have taken the initiative and are already offering domestic violence leave to staff.

We think New Zealanders in every workplace should have these protections. We want to make sure that in New Zealand, every employer and workplace is equipped to know what to do. It shouldn't be up to chance whether someone's workplace has these protections.

What can I do to help?

The bill will most likely come up for a vote on March 8, 2017 – it needs support from MPs to pass, so lobbying your MP for their support is helpful. Other ways to show your support and have a voice include talking about this on social media, writing a letter to the editor, calling talkback radio, including something in your church newsletter, and talking with friends and family about the bill.

For more information, including a copy of the bill, visit: <https://www.greens.org.nz/policy/fairer-society/domestic-violence-victims-protection-bill>