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Newsletter # 41

Hello –

I was a youth and mental health worker in Wangaratta when, in 2016, with Wodonga's Carol Roadknight, we founded a community-led campaign called #ENOUGHISENOUGH.

It stemmed from truly awful events. In 2015, a gorgeous young schoolgirl called Zoe Buttigieg was raped and murdered in Wangaratta. Three months later, Carol's friend Karen Chetcuti-Verbunt, a manager at Wangaratta council, was murdered near Whorouly and her body dumped in bush near Lake Buffalo.

When these crimes were committed, both perpetrators were on parole. Zoe was just 11. Karen, mother of two, was 49.

We wanted politicians, government and police to know that ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! A thousand people joined us in Wangaratta's main street in March 2016 to rally for:

- greater rights in the justice system for people harmed by crime, especially women and children
- tougher sentencing
- and a parole system for offenders that's strongly policed to protect us all

I remember ABC Goulburn Murray reporter Erin Somerville interviewing us at the time. She asked us why we'd done what we did: Because we'd decided – appalled by what families in our communities had just experienced – that we had to be the voice of those who had lost theirs.

It's a task that's not yet done. With the help of many people, I'm **working for fair, just, safe communities**.

In this newsletter, you'll read how the Attorney-General - answering me in Parliament on February 23 - pledged to strengthen protections for victims in violent relationships. She committed the government to making non-fatal strangulation, all too often perpetrated by men against women in intimate relationships, a stand-alone criminal offence.

With colleague Stuart Grimley MP, we've also put a response to the federal government's draft *National plan to end violence against women and children*.

And next week in Parliament, I'll be calling on the government to fix unnecessary, cruel and avoidable flaws in the Victims of Crime Financial Assistance Scheme.

You can always follow what I'm up to in Northern Victoria and Parliament at taniamaxwell.com.au or on my social media. In the meantime, please tell me where I can help you, and share your issues, ideas and comments with me by:

- Email tania.maxwell@parliament.vic.gov.au
- Direct message on [Facebook](#)
- Telephone 03 4700 1787 between 9:00am and 5:00pm weekdays

You're welcome to forward this newsletter to family and friends, too, and share it on your social media.

Thank you.

Jania

March 4, 2022



Moonbeam lily (Lilium leucanthum centifolium) flowering in a North East garden.

Stronger law protects family violence victims

I've welcomed a commitment by Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes to strengthen protections for victims in violent relationships by legislating non-fatal strangulation as a criminal offence in Victoria.

The children of the late Joy Rowley – three years after the government promised to make this change – will be relieved.

State Coroner Sara Hinchey in 2018 found Ms Rowley was strangled and then suffocated by James Mulhall in her Rye home in October 2011.

Mulhall, who had earlier been violent towards her and breached an intervention order, pleaded guilty to her murder and was sentenced to 19 years in prison.

So the commitment made to me by the Attorney-General in Parliament on February 22 is significant, because non-fatal strangulation is often carried out in family violence incidents.

The University of Melbourne Law School reported in a study published last year that it's now recognised as extremely dangerous.

As a form of physical abuse, the study found that it's 'overwhelmingly perpetrated' by men against women, the injuries inflicted are often invisible, and the risk of future harm and death is high where family violence occurs.

But a charge of assault – which the study reported as most common where an offence of non-fatal strangulation is not on the statute books – does not reflect the seriousness of this level of violence.

Ms Rowley's children had to fight for an inquest into their mother's death.

Judge Hinchey said in her findings that a stand-alone offence for strangulation, suffocation or choking in Victoria may significantly help to recognise the serious risk for victims and remove the need to prove particular intent or harm.

The offence is in place in other states.

View my [question, the Attorney-General's answer](#) and [media statement](#).

Attorney backs coroner recommendation

Reform promised for Joy Rowley's family



Further, the new offence may build further awareness of the potential lethality of strangulation among police members, courts and practitioners.

164. I understand that Victoria Police Family Violence Command's Issues Paper of a stand-alone offence of strangulation will be referred to the Department of Justice and Regulation for consideration of legislative amendment in due course.⁸⁴ Family Violence Command's work on this important issue and potential gap in legislation is to be commended, and I support their efforts to drive legislative change to better protect victims of family violence.

⁸¹ Family Violence Death Review Committee. (2014). Fourth Annual Report; Thomas, K.A., Joshi, M. & Sorenson, S.B. (2014). 'Do You Know What It Feels Like to Drown?': Strangulation as Coercive Control in Intimate Relationships. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38(1), 127-137; Sorenson, S.B., Joshi, M. & Sivitz, E. (2014). A Systematic Review of the Epidemiology of Nonfatal Strangulation, a Human Rights and Health Concern. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(11), 54-61

¹² Sections 22-23 *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic)

³ Douglas, H. & Fitzgerald, R. (2014). *Strangulation*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 253-254

TANIA MAXWELL MP

The coroner's recommendation to better protect family violence victims following the death of Joy Rowley.

Standing for justice

Supporters and speakers at March4Justice on February 27 at QEII Square in Albury were so inspiring.

I spoke at the rally alongside Kate Kadylo with baby Zurah in her arms, Purple Chicken's Jen Tait, organiser and survivor-advocate Liz Marmo, Wiradjuri woman and survivor Tammy Campbell, and Judy Langridge - standing strong against violence.

I took along our 2016 #ENOUGHISENOUGH Wangaratta rally banner in honour and remembrance of those now voiceless, including Zoe Buttigieg and Karen Chetcuti-Verbunt, Jill Meagher, Alicia Little, Masa Vukotic, Celeste Manno, and so many others.

If we are to end violence, all levels of government in Australia must work together to deliver laws and services that apply consistently right across the country for us to live in **fair, just, safe communities**.



Taking part in the March4Justice in Albury-Wodonga on February 27.

Actions should follow national plan

Parliamentary colleague Stuart Grimley MP and I have put a response to the federal government's draft *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*.

We welcome recognition that violence causes significant and enduring harm to victims and victim-survivors. But any plan can only be as good as the actions that follow.

We said that state and national responses to violence must be victim-centred, provide appropriate interventions to address the causes of violence, and ensure offenders are held to account for their actions.

We said intervention programs must be delivered earlier and more intensively to deliver real change.

Assistance schemes and therapeutic supports for victim-survivors and victims' families should provide flexible and enduring services to victim-survivors.

Read our [submission](#).

Road safety funding approved

A state government investment of \$9.7 million will make Northern Victoria's roads safer for drivers and local communities.

Victoria will fund 20 per cent and the federal government 80 per cent for safety works at Avenel, Bendigo, Cosgrove South, Shepparton, Kilmore, Warracknabeal to Birchip, and Robinvale to Sealake costing almost \$49m in the third round of the national Road Safety Program announced last week.

I'm really pleased to see money for improvements to the complicated and dangerous intersection where Jones and Tarcombe roads join the Hume Freeway at Avenel, which the community and I have been chasing for almost three years.

The funded project, costing \$720,000, will improve signage and line-marking and that's a good step.

The Victorian and federal governments say the changes will help drivers and riders correct their actions approaching the intersection, reducing the risk of serious injuries and fatalities.

Read my [media statement](#).



With Avenel Active chair Jen Arnold (left), member Helen Dawson, former chair Jeff Moran and long-time intersection upgrade advocate Sandy Mackenzie to discuss the safety project in Avenel on February 28.

Next week in Parliament

March 8-10, 2022

New bills

[Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022](#)

- Amends the process for incorporating material into Codes of Practice under the [Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987](#).

[Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence\) Bill 2022](#)

- Allows for certain offences under the [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981](#) to be dealt with by way of drug education or treatment notice.

[Justice Legislation Amendment \(Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#)

- Allows for judge-alone criminal trials on a temporary basis while a pandemic declaration is in force, extends the operation of changes to certain other Acts and delays the commencement of some appeals reforms.

[Road Safety Amendment \(Hoon Events\) Bill 2021](#)

- Adds new offences in the [Road Safety Act 1986](#) in relation to hoon events.

Passed the Assembly (will now go to the Legislative Council)

[Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022](#)

[Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022](#)

[Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2021](#)

Passed Parliament (now go to the Governor for royal assent)

[Domestic Animals Amendment \(Reuniting Pets and Other Matters\) Bill 2021](#)

[Health Legislation Amendment \(Quality and Safety\) Bill 2021](#)

[Major Events Legislation Amendment \(Unauthorised Ticket Packages and Other Matters\) Bill 2021](#)

[Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2021](#)

[Sex Work Decriminalisation Bill 2021](#)

Working for a better ambulance service

It was so valuable to catch up with Ambulance Victoria Loddon Mallee acting regional director Amelia Kohn at North Bendigo headquarters on February 18.

We talked about ambulance response times and ramping, where a paramedic crew has to queue their ambulance at hospital emergency before a patient can be assessed by medical staff. It's been a major issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amelia told me about the process underway at Bendigo Health and elsewhere in the state to deal with ramping. A hospital ambulance support manager coordinates with a patient off-load team to triage a patient so the ambulance can get back on-call.

I'm working in Parliament to make sure the government supports our paramedics and improves community safety in Northern Victoria. If you'd like to share your ambulance service or triple-zero call experience, please email me at tania.maxwell@parliament.vic.gov.au or call my office 03 4700 1787.



At Ambulance Victoria's North Bendigo headquarters.

Shelter costs dog Campaspe ratepayers

I asked Agriculture Minister Mary-Anne Thomas in Parliament on February 22 to detail how much the state government reinvests in Campaspe Shire communities to promote responsible pet ownership.

The government receives about \$45,000 every year from the council, or \$4.16 for every registered dog and cat in the shire.

These payments are supposed to be used by the government to promote responsible ownership, administer the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, support animal welfare and fund research into domestic animal management.

But Campaspe council spends anywhere from \$800,000 to \$1 million every year from ratepayer funds on shelter operations, and these are basically at capacity all the time, because there's no time limit on the council keeping animals assessed as suitable for re-homing.

The shelters also need to expand in order to meet demand, and this will cost \$525,000 for Campaspe's cat facility to remain compliant.

Given the rates at which pets are abandoned, it is clear that many people become pet owners probably with the best of intentions but without a clear understanding of the responsibility and costs associated with pet ownership. Education is an important prevention tool to encourage people to consider this responsibility before taking on a pet.

I think it is incumbent on the government, having collected these funds from councils and from ratepayers, to give transparent and comprehensive feedback on the expenditure of those funds in our local communities.



Food donations for animals in Campaspe council's care.

Nurse-on-call

Nurse-on-call puts you directly in touch with a registered nurse for caring, professional health advice around the clock.

Call **1300 60 60 24** from anywhere in Victoria for free health advice, 24 hours a day.

If you think your situation is an emergency, you should always call **000** or go to a hospital emergency department.





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