

**Jenny Aitchison MP**

Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

**Sophie Cotsis MLC**

Shadow Minister for Women



Tuesday, 19 July, 2016

## **PETITION FOR NSW GOVERNMENT TO FUND FRONTLINE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WORKERS LAUNCHED**

The Opposition has launched a petition calling on the Baird Government to restore funding to domestic violence caseworkers and counsellors working in early intervention.

Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Jenny Aitchison and Shadow Minister for Women Sophie Cotsis visited the Sydney Women's Counselling Service today, one of a number around the state that was forced to let go of a domestic violence counsellor when funding ran out on June 30, 2016.

The petition is being launched statewide to bring on a debate in the Parliament against the cuts which have also affected the Penrith and Cumberland Women's Health Centres, which have also lost workers.

These centres lost funding in the wake of the NSW Government's 2014 restructure of domestic violence services and the government's reforms have not filled the gaps.

The services provided domestic violence counselling and case work services to women who were ineligible for assistance under the Government's Staying Home Leaving Violence Program, which does not assist women who are still living with their partners.

Domestic violence is chronically under-reported, as many women do not have anywhere to go, and cannot access assistance. In many cases, the first point of contact for women experiencing violence is Women's Health Services and Counselling Services.

Under the previous program, once violence was reported, these services provided crucial early intervention to victims and their families, with counselling, case management, and assistance with housing, health and accessing income support.

All three services have made repeated requests to the NSW government to extend their funding, with no response. Ms Aitchison has supported these representations, but has similarly had no response.

Just two weeks ago, Ms Aitchison slammed the government over its admission it did not know how many refuge beds were available for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Ms Aitchison says the cuts to funding and the fact that the government doesn't know how many beds are provided by refuges shows that they do not understand the full complexity of victims suffering domestic violence.

Ms Aitchison said the Government was "tinkering around the edges" with moves to make it easier for women who were experiencing domestic violence to break rental leases, while at the same time making fundamental cuts to the counsellors and case managers who could help them through the process.

To print a copy of the petition calling for the restoration of funding to domestic violence caseworkers and counsellors head to [www.jennyaitchison.com.au](http://www.jennyaitchison.com.au)

#### **Quotes attributable to Shadow Minister for Women Sophie Cotsis**

*“Women’s health centres and counselling services are uniquely placed to provide early intervention in cases of domestic and family violence – it is vital that these services are restored immediately.”*

#### **Quotes attributable to Manager of the Sydney Women’s Counselling Centre, Margherita Basile**

*“Seventy women have had to be turned away from our service over a fortnight due to a lack of capacity. Further cuts will just increase the number of women being turned away.”*

#### **Quotes attributable to Shadow Minister for Education and Member for Lakemba Jihad Dib**

*“Our responsibility is to ensure the most vulnerable are protected, to provide a place for them to turn to when most in need. To close a crucial service like this effectively shuts the door on women from the Lakemba area at a time when they most need a hand.”*

#### **Quotes attributable to Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Jenny Aitchison**

*“I have made three representations to the Minister on this issue. Other Members of Parliament and the services themselves have also made representations, but the Minister has failed to respond to any of us. The petition is the last chance to show the importance of these services to our community, and I hope that people will take the time to sign so that we can support women and children experiencing violence.*

*“This government is touting reforms and says it’s committed to stamping out domestic violence, but it’s failing to put money where it is needed most, in frontline workers and beds in refuges. Other reforms will fail unless we get these foundations right.*

*“Women’s health centres and counselling centres are an important first point of contact for many women experiencing domestic violence. A case manager who can maintain support for them throughout this difficult process is vital to their escape from violence.*

*“The consistent message I am getting from workers in this sector is that accommodation, counselling and support services are what is needed most.”*