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Addressing domestic violence is everyone's responsibility

Domestic violence is a social issue that must be tackled and taken seriously by all members of our community, including employers.

"Addressing domestic violence is everyone's responsibility," ACTU President Ged Kearney said.

"Domestic violence is not - and should not - be a private matter that is dealt with behind closed doors.

"Australian Unions welcome the positive comments today by some employer groups - such as the National Retailers Association - in acknowledging that employers have a critical role to play in supporting victims of domestic violence.

"Two thirds of the 400,000 plus people who experience domestic violence each year are in paid employment and we know that keeping that job is critical in leaving a violent relationship."

Ms Kearney said that many employers have already recognised the importance of paid domestic violence leave with over 1.6 million workers already able to access the entitlement through union negotiated workplace agreements.

"Big employers such as the National Australian Bank and Queensland Rail for example provide domestic violence leave as do a large number of local government organisations around the nation so we know it can work and work effectively," Ms Kearney said.

"It's disappointing that the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has chosen to ignore the role that employers play in the community and in supporting employees that are experiencing domestic violence.

"Employers - including ACCI - are often very ready to say they are part of the community and we expect this sentiment to prevail in relation to supporting domestic violence leave."

Ms Kearney said one in three Australian women experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

"It is a systemic issue involving a wide range of social, economic and cultural factors that must be addressed in the public sphere - including workplaces," Ms Kearney said.

"Having access to domestic violence leave means victims have time to attend court appearances and related appointments, seek legal advice and make relocation arrangements.

"Our claim also includes the right to request a change in working arrangements, such as start and finish times and other safety measures such as changing work email and phone numbers.

"Evidence shows having an income gives women choice, stops them becoming trapped and isolated in violent and abusive relationships, and enables them to care for their children and provide them with a safe home environment."

The ACTU claim for domestic violence leave will be lodged in the Fair Work Commission today as part of the review of modern awards currently underway.

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