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MEDIA RELEASE

28 August 2018

GEN VIC supports the Racial and Religious Tolerance Amendment Bill 2019

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is proud to support the Racial and Religious Tolerance Amendment Bill 2019 as proposed by Fiona Patten, Leader of the Reason Party earlier today.

The Bill serves to amend and rename the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to extend those protections to vilification based on gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

A key focus of the Bill is to address online harassment, discrimination and vilification of marginalised groups. Online harassment is often targeted at women, and it can quickly escalate to more extreme and threatening forms of online abuse underpinned by misogyny, racism and homophobia. With almost half of all Australian women have experienced online harassment, it is time the law caught up.

Last year, The United Nations called for urgent action by states around the world to introduce new legislation to stamp out online and information and communications technology facilitated violence against women and girls.

In response, Gender Equity Victoria launched the Online Active Bystander Project - a world-first project to address sexual abuse and violence against women online through a program that educated people as to how to call out sexism and aggression on the internet. GEN VIC is also working with the Media Arts Entertainment Alliance (MEAA) to assist media organisations in understanding the gendered nature of violence and how it impacts women journalists online.

“We see this Bill as an important and necessary measure to address violence against women in online spaces and hold perpetrators to account. Systematic political change needs to occur in order for women and other marginalised groups to be safe both on and offline.”

“We know that to end violence against women, we need to prevent it before it occurs. Alongside this Bill, we need greater investment in preventing the online abuse before it occurs. GEN VIC’s Active Online Bystander is the only project of its kind in Australia, putting a spotlight on bystanders and community responsibility to create safe online spaces for women,” said Kit McMahon, Chair of GEN VIC.

Gender Equity Victoria wholeheartedly supports the Bill.

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ABOUT GENDER EQUITY VICTORIA

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) the Victorian peak body for gender equity, women's health and the prevention of violence against women.

Our vision is equality, wellbeing and freedom from violence for every woman and girl in every community of Victoria.

GEN VIC's key priorities are to:

- Advance gender equity
- Promote women's sexual and reproductive health
- Prevent violence against women
- Build an influential and sustainable peak body.

<https://www.genvic.org.au/focus-areas/projects/online-active-bystander-project/>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON ONLINE GENDER-BASED ABUSE

- 76% of Australian women under 30 and 47% of all Australian women experience online harassment. Social media and online discussion forums are key platforms used to carry out online gendered harassment. Norton by Symantec (2017) Online Harassment: The Australian Women's Perspective, Symantec, Australia.
- In an online context, for those users who challenge gender norms, behaviours and practices, resistance can quickly elevate into extreme forms of online abuse informed by misogyny, racism and homophobia. It is such online backlash that is increasingly reported in academic literature as an emerging form of violence against women. Lewis, R, Rowe, M and Wiper, C (2016) Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls, British Journal of Criminology, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom.
- Women targeted for online abuse suffer a range of psychological, professional and financial impacts. Hess, Amanda. 2014. "Why Women Aren't Welcome on the Internet." Pacific Standard, April 3. <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/health-and-behavior/women-arent-welcome-internet-72170/>.; Battersby, Lucy. 2013. "Twitter Criticised for failing to Respond to Caroline Criado-Perez Rape Threats." Sydney Morning Herald, July 29. <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/digital-lifeneews/twitter-criticised-for-failing-to-respond-to-carolinecriadoperez-rape-threats-20130729-2qu8d.html>.
- Online abuse can cause women to self-censor or withdraw from social media altogether to avoid abuse. Jane, E (2016) Online misogyny and feminist digitalism, Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, Taylor and Francis Group, United Kingdom.
- Online sexism and gendered abuse is the product of gender inequality. Fox, J, Cruz, C, Young, Lee (2015) Perpetuating online sexism offline: Anonymity, interactivity, and the effects of sexist hashtags on social media, Computers in Human Behavior, School of Communication, The Ohio State University, Columbus.
- "States around the world must act urgently to introduce new legislation to stamp out online and information and communications technology (ICT) facilitated violence against women and girls, which is yet another way in which their human rights are being violated, a UN expert has said." UN Press Release, 2018

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23231&LangID=E%20>