



Secretary

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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BAC-EOB-479

Kate Sanderson
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Sanderson

Investigation into the death of Caroline Willis – COR 2018 002451

I refer to your letter dated 23 April 2024, which enclosed a copy of Coroner Judge Cain's findings into the death of Caroline Willis and recommendations made to Family Safety Victoria (FSV), a Division of the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (the department).

Coroner Cain recognised the significant reform in responding to family violence in Victoria and made one recommendation for FSV regarding the Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) program.

I provide the following response to the recommendation on behalf of the department.

Recommendation

To improve processes related to public health and safety and the administration of justice, I recommend that Family Safety Victoria review processes for victim-survivors eligibility to access Safe at Home technology through the Personal Safety Initiative during high-risk periods immediately following family violence incidents and/or individual and police initiated FVIO applications. This includes consulting with Victoria Police Family Violence Command and the Magistrates Court of Victoria Family Violence Action Taskforce.

The department supports this recommendation in principle. The department gives priority to supporting victims to safely remain in, or return to, their own homes and communities through the expansion of Safe at Home programs across Victoria.

The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) program has been established to identify and use safety and security responses, including property modifications and technology, to:

- enable victim-survivors of family violence to remain safely in, or return safely to, their own homes and communities or relocate to a new home
- increase safety and feelings of safety for victim-survivors
- deter breaches of Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIOs), and
- facilitate the collection of admissible evidence where breaches occur to hold perpetrators accountable for their use of violence.



The department ensures every safety and security response is informed by a safety and security audit, completed by a suitably qualified security provider. The audit will inform property modifications and personal safety technology to meet the *Minimum Technology Standards* and the *PSI Minimum requirements* for auditing, installation and monitoring services.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recognised that technology alone is not sufficient to enable victim-survivors to stay safely in their own homes and that other elements, including case management, effective risk management, justice responses, and information sharing are necessary to ensure that safe at home strategies can be effective. The PSI program provides eligible victim-survivors with coordination of personal safety, security and technology responses through the collaboration of specialist family violence case managers and the 17 PSI Coordinators located statewide.

The 2024/25 State Budget provided \$72 million over two years to family violence victim survivors supports across Victoria, including \$1.2 million over two years to continue the Personal Safety Initiative. This includes continuing our investment in expanded access to technology and security responses to improve personal safety as part of the statewide Personal Safety Initiative.

The department acknowledges that the eligibility criteria for the PSI program do not always allow for the provision of safety audits and safety technology in the period immediately following the granting of a Family Violence Intervention Order or Family Violence Safety Notice. This is in part also due to the timeline of the application and implementation processes for the security technology and that some victim survivors are not yet engaged with a specialist family violence service.

The department will commence consultations in November 2024 with the specialist family violence sector to review the PSI program guidance and supporting documents, including to identify requirements for a safety response at the time of a crisis and any service gaps. The consultation will include engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, including Victoria Police and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, as recommended by Coroner Cain, the Risk Assessment and Management Panel (RAMP) members, and relevant peak bodies such as No To Violence and Safe and Equal.

The consultations will also inform the implementation of the Strengthening Women's Safety Package, announced in May 2024, which committed a boost to flexible funding for essential safety and security measures and responses, such as home alarms, personal duress alarms, safety audits, locks and external lighting, over three years.

Coroner Cain's recommendation **will be implemented** through the 2024-25 planned review of the PSI program, which includes a review of the eligibility criteria. This is expected to be completed in October 2025.

Should you have any queries, please contact Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety Victoria [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peta McCammon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peta McCammon
Secretary
12/08/2024