

# Media Release

**The Hon Jill Hennessy MP**

Attorney-General

Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety – COVID-19

Minister for Workplace Safety



Monday, 13 July 2020

## REVIEWS TO ADDRESS SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN COURTS AND LAW

Practices to prevent and address sexual harassment across the state's courts and VCAT will be closely examined as part of a review announced today by the Victorian Government.

The review has been jointly initiated with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Chair of the Courts Council, and will identify ways to build a culture that calls out sexual harassment, and give workers and others across the justice system the confidence to speak up without fear of reprisal.

This review will consider measures to prevent sexual harassment, improve reporting and support for those who experience sexual harassment, raise awareness, and ensure accountability in workplaces.

Former Commissioner of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Dr Helen Szoke AO will lead the review – Dr Szoke is also a member of the Judicial Commission of Victoria, a former Chief Executive Officer for Oxfam Australia and former Race Discrimination Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Research by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner recently found more than one in three lawyers experienced sexual harassment at work in the last five years.

Courts are an integral part of the wider justice system and it is important that all partners – Prosecutions, Legal Aid, VicBar and the Law Institute of Victoria – build a culture across the system that calls out sexual harassment.

The review will be undertaken in close consultation with the Judicial Commission of Victoria to ensure the state's judiciary maintains the highest standards of integrity.

Separately, the Government will also conduct a review of the policies and practices of law firms that provide services to government – including working with partners to review training on sexual harassment for all barristers and solicitors, and seek internal audits and assurance on their processes around sexual harassment.

The Government is working towards gender equality across the judiciary, with female heads of jurisdiction at VCAT, the Supreme, Magistrates and Children's Courts, and 50 per cent female representation at the Magistrates' Court.

### Quotes attributable to the Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

*"A workplace that is not free from sexual harassment is an unsafe workplace – these reviews will identify the changes the justice and legal sectors need to make to improve workplace culture and enforce compliance."*

*"I want to thank the women who have bravely stood up and shared their stories, as well as acknowledge the commitment from our Heads of Jurisdiction to ensuring their workplaces are safe, healthy and respectful."*

### Quote attributable to the Chief Justice of Victoria

*"Victoria's courts and tribunal are united in our commitment to building a culture of respect across our workplaces – improper and unethical conduct will not be tolerated under any circumstances and we look forward to working with Dr Szoke's review."*

**Media contact:** Jamila Fontana 0409 741 279 | [jamila.fontana@minstaff.vic.gov.au](mailto:jamila.fontana@minstaff.vic.gov.au)