

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC
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NEW LEGISLATION KEEPING THE WHEELS OF JUSTICE TURNING

New laws to ensure the justice system can continue to operate safely, effectively and efficiently as we recover from the effects of COVID-19 have passed Victorian Parliament.

The *Justice Legislation Amendment (System Enhancements and Other Matters) Bill 2021* makes permanent a range of temporary measures introduced in response to COVID-19 – enshrining these sensible improvements throughout the justice system and helping courts to reduce the backlog of cases.

These laws enable courts to continue to hear a wider range of matters via audio visual link and make appropriate decisions without an in-person hearing – ensuring more matters can be heard quickly, while keeping court users safe.

This Bill will modernise how Victorians access justice by providing for electronic signing and remote witnessing of important legal documents including deeds, wills, powers of attorney, statutory declarations and affidavits.

Developed in close consultation with the Law Institute of Victoria, the Courts, the Office of the Public Advocate and other key stakeholders, the electronic witnessing reforms include appropriate safeguards against misuse to protect vulnerable Victorians accessing these services.

The Bill also continues measures that ensure the safe, efficient running of integrity agencies such as IBAC, OVIC and the Ombudsman – such as streamlined arrangements for serving documents, enabling remote attendance and examinations, and providing for electronic inspection of documents.

The Bill also temporarily extends measures to keep the community safe from ongoing public health risks related to the pandemic – including important reforms that ensure WorkSafe inspectors can take action in response to COVID-19 risks in the workplace.

Critical measures to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 into prisons and youth justice facilities will also continue for a further 12 months under the proposed laws.

To make sure families with children in and out of home care are not unfairly impacted by COVID-related disruption to services, amendments allowing the Children’s Court to provide an additional six months to a family reunification order will also be extended.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

“Our justice system’s response to the global pandemic has been nothing short of extraordinary. We’ve adapted to make it faster and easier for more Victorians to access our courts, tribunals and legal processes.”

“With this Bill, we’re making sure the community continues to benefit from those positive changes – particularly for people in regional and rural Victoria who may not normally have access to in-person services.”

“This is a significant step forward in modernising the law in Victoria in the digital age – using the latest technology to more effectively deliver critical services and improve access to justice.”