

Media Release

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Attorney-General

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NEW LAWS TO IMPROVE COURT SAFETY AND JURY SELECTION

The Andrews Labor Government introduced new laws in Parliament today to make Victorian courts safer and reduce potential discrimination against women during jury selection.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Court Security, Juries and Other Matters) Bill 2017 will give Court Security Officers (CSOs) stronger powers to keep the community safe, particularly vulnerable victims and witnesses.

CSOs are appointed as authorised officers under the *Court Security Act 1980*. The reforms will expand and clarify the powers of authorised officers so that they can prevent and appropriately respond to security incidents, such as directing court users to stay away from other parties and escorting vulnerable people.

The changes will clarify that reasonable force may be used by authorised officers in the exercise of their powers. They can also give directions for the safety, security and order of courts, such as directing a person on court premises to stop harassing or intimidating other people, behaving violently or damaging property.

This will reduce the risk of people being subjected to threats or physical harm from another person and ensure that vulnerable court users, such as victims of family violence, will be more likely to attend court in relation to their legal issues.

Authorised officers will also be given the power to stop someone from making an unauthorised recording and direct a person to delete a recording that has already been made.

The reforms are part of the Labor Government's \$58.1 million commitment to deliver a new court security model and upgrade court facilities. All Victorian courts, including regional locations, will have entry screening capability and an increased presence of Court Security Officers.

Additionally the Bill will implement a number of key recommendations made by the Victorian Law Reform Commission in its *Jury Empanelment Report (2014)*.

The jury selection process will be tightened to reduce potential discrimination by reducing the number of challenges without reason. For example, where there is a single accused in a criminal proceeding, the number of challenges without reason will be reduced from six down to three.

The commission found peremptory challenges are disproportionately used against potential female jurors in criminal trials, which reduces their representation on juries.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Martin Pakula

"We want all Victorians to feel safe at court and that's why we're giving authorised security officers stronger powers to better protect people attending court."

"Our changes will also ensure that juries better reflect the community and that women are not discriminated against during the empanelment process."