



**Saoirse Domestic Violence Services Submission to the Joint Committee on Children, Equality,  
Integration and Youth on**

**Pre-Committee Stage Consideration of – The Organisation of Working Time (Domestic Violence  
Leave) Bill 2020**

**Opening Statement – Presentation to Committee**

**Ref: CDEIY-I-423-22**

**26<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Domestic violence is the abuse of power over another person in an intimate or close family relationship, by a perpetrator, to maintain absolute control over another. It takes many forms from physical to psychological, financial to sexual, intimidation to coercive control. It also occurs in all walk of life, all facets of Irish Society, and imposes serious harm to those suffering its relentless grip day in day out. Victims of domestic violence quite often suffer silently, if they have not reached out for support, or told family, friends, or work colleagues. They keep the essentials going - going to work, study, minding their children, looking after their home, paying bills and put on a brave face to keep everyday life and commitments functioning as much as possible. Financial abuse has been disclosed by more and more women over the past 5-10 years, in our services. These include women in paid employment who have little or no control over their own wages.

The availability of access to Domestic Violence Leave from work, will play an essential role in providing crucial compassionate supports to staff and also in the acknowledgment that there are women and men in every workplace in Ireland suffering violent relationships when they go home. Having access to domestic violence leave will benefit victims in the short term, by offering some immediate space to access support services, seek refuge or move house, attend court to secure legal protections, while not having to worry about their job security or loss of wages. A lot of these appointments are during working hours, so people are forced to take annual leave days or unpaid absence, or even leave their job, to access help. In the longer term, the benefits will include employment sustainability and financial independence as well as continued awareness raising of domestic violence.

At Saoirse Domestic Violence Services, we have worked with many women over the years who struggle with balancing work and living in a violent relationship. Women who were forced to flee the abuse day or night, and make their way to our refuge. They may have fled with only the clothes on them and no clear knowledge of where they are going. They could be due in work the next morning after escaping with their children during the night, often with some physical as well as psychological injuries. They worry about not going into work, calling in sick, or asking for time off at short notice, as they usually haven't disclosed their abuse to their employer or manager. They worry about losing their job if they are new there or still on probation. They can't afford to take unpaid days off. They may be staying in a refuge in a different county, have to get children to school or creche, have limited family supports near by and have the worry of work in the mix. When woman have been able to tell their employer, as for help and time off, they have always felt an immediate relief that they can stop juggling that piece for now and instead focus on themselves, their children, and their safety options.

Women in our services often feel a massive shame about telling their employer that they are in a violent relationship and worry about confidentiality if it's a smaller organisation or connected to family / friends, for example. They will persevere in silence, keeping the job going, rather than feel shame, but also to protect the perpetrator. The recognition of these women's experiences, by legislating for the provision of domestic violence leave is very powerful. It tells them that we believe them and what they are going through is important to us. It tells them that domestic violence is not tolerated and it provides immediate practical support, when they need it, without fear of consequences. Not having a requirement to prove the domestic violence to an employer is welcomed as many victims may not have sought out any supports yet or reported it to anyone, and could act as a barrier to people taking this leave if they felt they have to prove they are being abused. Importantly, it also sends out a clear message that domestic violence is not a private matter, best keep behind closed doors. It is affecting too many women, men and children and it affects their work life too.

Now is the time to act on this and swiftly follow the lead of some commendable organisations and third level institutions in Ireland, who have already introduced domestic violence leave.

Saoirse Domestic Violence Services fully supports the provision of Domestic Violence Leave within the Organisation of Working Time Bill 2020 spearheaded by Deputy Louise O'Reilly and Deputy Mary Lou McDonald and welcome the speedy introduction of it without further delay.

**Allison Graham**

**Chief Executive Officer**

**Saoirse Domestic Violence Services**