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**Independent Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police
Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence**

- **from Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc.**

1. **Overview**

Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc is grateful for the opportunity to provide this submission to this Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Queensland Police Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence. We Congratulate our State Government for the chance to improve our Queensland Police Force to be more efficient, relevant and more responsive to survivors of violence. A positive initial contact experience with police is crucial for survivors of violence and a high-quality police and justice response must be available and accessible to all women and girls who are navigating an often-complex justice system, especially those who are most marginalised and are at greater risk of experiencing violence.

Our membership base consists of business, community and professional women who advocate for women and girls. As part of the global advocacy organisation, Soroptimist International, (SI), we are committed as a volunteer movement to work together to transform the lives of women and girls. Our network of around 70,000 club members in 121 countries works at a local, national, and international level to Educate, Empower and Enable opportunities for women and girls.

2. **Introduction**

"We know that positive initial contact with police is crucial for survivors of violence as they navigate complex justice systems. Women in this situation need to be treated with respect and know that their experience is being taken seriously and promptly from the moment they reach out. And they need to have confidence that their attackers are not going to escape justice," explains Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women.

Violence against women and girls ('VAWG') has long been a pervasive and universal human rights issue, rooted in unequal power relations, structural inequalities and discrimination.

It is estimated that just over one in three women worldwide (35 per cent) experience physical or sexual violence, mostly perpetrated by an intimate partner,¹ and this statistic does not include sexual harassment. Other forms of VAWG include gender-related killings (also referred to as ‘femicide’), non-partner sexual violence; trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and other forms of forced labour; female genital mutilation/cutting and other harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, and so-called ‘honour killings.’ Women and girls often experience multiple forms of violence as part of a continuum - in times of peace or conflict, or in the wake of conflict - and in multiple settings, including within the family, at work, at school, in the community, online, and in public spaces.

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has greatly exacerbated many of the risk factors associated with VAWG.² Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, VAWG, in particular domestic violence, has intensified, in what has been described as a ‘shadow pandemic.’³

3. “Where We Stand”: Soroptimist International Position Paper on Gender Based Violence

Soroptimist International is committed to end all forms of violence which affect women and girls disproportionately. Gender-based violence occurs in the family, in the general community, and through actions perpetrated or condoned by the State. Whatever form it takes, gender-based violence is deeply rooted in historical inequalities, power imbalances, and gender-based discrimination. Gender based violence is a violation of human rights and affects the ability of women and girls to reach their full potential and participate in society.

4. Our Asks:

- A. As ‘All Women and Girls and their diversity’ are disproportionately affected by Domestic and family violence, we ask that our Queensland Police Force and all associated multi-sectors take on a survivor-centred approach.
- B. That our Queensland Police Force enable an effective and gender-sensitive response to violence against women and girls by sharing learning that promotes a culture of reflection and learning, leading to institutional transformation;
- C. That our Queensland Police Force promote a Police Service that seeks to balance effectiveness with accountability in their response to violence against women and girls through reviewing, evaluating and monitoring investigation tools, strategies, policies, and approaches, with the support of external actors in civil society;

D. That our Queensland Police Force seek to inspire behavioural change towards prevention orientated policing that is gender-responsive, trauma-informed and perpetrator focused;

E. To arrive at this desired behaviour change, we ask that the outcomes listed below be considered in the planned Transformative change:

- the Police Organisation is gender responsive and broadly consulted;
- The Police are ensuring the wellbeing and meaningful participation of victims/survivors when coordinating their response to VAWG in the justice continuum;
- That investigations into violence against women and girls are standardised and with internal oversight, in order that they are internally controlled to be perpetrator focused and trauma-informed.

F. We ask for the changes to engage senior management on institutional transformation and training for frontline responders, in police academies and 'refresher courses' to enable and empower their front-line staff to deliver a truly victim-focused response to reports of such crimes of Family and Domestic Violence, including the emerging issues such as online and ICT-facilitated violence against All women and girls and their diversity.

On behalf of Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc, thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. Should you have any questions, please contact us per details provided.

Kind Regards

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References:

1. World Health Organisation (2013), Global and regional estimates of violence against women, at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564625>.
2. Report of the Secretary-General on the Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (2020), <https://undocs.org/en/A/75/274>.
3. See, for example, remarks of the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women (2020), at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-11-25/remarks-international-day-for-elimination-of-violence-against-women>