



To: The Joint Sessional Committee

Thank you for the upcoming opportunity to have input into the implementation of the 191 recommendations made in the Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry (Col). We appreciate the critical role the Joint Sessional Committee (from here, 'Committee') has in inquiring into the implementation of the Col recommendations and are keen to support this process through insights from our perspective as a specialist sexual assault support service.

While a separate submission from Laurel House is forthcoming, we felt the need to submit this letter earlier given the critical nature of its contents following on from conversations with two members of the Committee.

We are curious to understand the mechanisms through which the Committee intends to engage victim-survivors and their families and communities as a part of the Committee's business as usual operating model. We feel this should be a core aspect of the Committee's work but are concerned at a potential lack of trauma-informed structures through which to do so.

We understand that the Department of Premier and Cabinet has various lived experience advisory groups in the space of domestic, family, and sexual violence and of child sexual abuse. The establishment of these groups is a welcome step towards integrating lived experience in the core work done in this space. We would be interested to understand the extent to which the Committee intends to engage with these groups.

We feel it important to emphasise, however, that the Committee's engagement with victim-survivors must occur beyond consultative groups such as these (or any additional groups established in the future relating to the implementation of the Col recommendations). Consultative groups are one valuable engagement mechanism. However, they are most often a small number of likely already highly engaged (and often privileged) people.

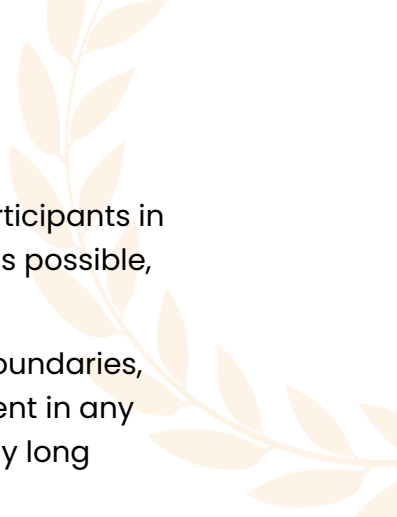
We believe there should be requirements for the Committee to consult with a broader group of victim-survivors, those with relevant lived (and living) experience, and those who advocate with/for victim-survivors to ensure a truly

diverse range of voices inform the activities of the Committee. Such engagement should offer meaningful opportunities for victim-survivors to have real influence on the Committee's work across all stages of implementation, ideally with the capacity to hold the Committee accountable.

As a specialist sexual assault service, we regularly undertake work to support, consult, and engage with victim-survivors. We are keen to share our expertise in this space for the benefit of the Committee. We have shared below a set of best practice principles for engaging with victim-survivors of sexual assault (including child sexual abuse) which we hope may guide the Committee as they consider how they may integrate such engagement into their work.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGING WITH VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

1. **Trauma-Informed Approach:** Ensure all interactions are grounded in an understanding of trauma, its impacts, and the need for safety, trust, and respect in every engagement, ensuring those engaging with victim-survivors have the appropriate training and support to do so.
2. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Maintain strict confidentiality and respect for the privacy of victim-survivors, ensuring they feel secure in sharing their experiences and are able to share their lived experiences through either/both identifiable and anonymous avenues.
3. **Empowerment and Choice:** Prioritise the autonomy of victim-survivors, offering choices at every stage of engagement and empowering them to make decisions about their involvement.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity:** Be mindful of diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences, providing an inclusive environment where all victim survivors feel understood, respected, and supported to contribute in ways which remove barriers and are tailored to meet their needs.
5. **Intersectionality:** Recognise and address the intersecting identities of victim-survivors, understanding how factors such as race, gender, sexuality, disability, and socioeconomic status (etc.) may shape their experience of sexual assault and their access to support services.
6. **Non-Revictimisation:** Avoid practices that may retraumatise or re-victimise victim-survivors, ensuring any recounting or engagement with their experience is voluntary and sensitive.
7. **Holistic Support:** Acknowledge the broader context of victim-survivors' needs, including physical, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, and ensure provision of and connection to appropriate support services.

- 
8. **Collaborative Approach:** Engage victim-survivors as active participants in shaping outputs that affect them from as early in the process as possible, ensuring their voices are integral to decision-making.
 9. **Respect for Boundaries:** Always respect the victim-survivors' boundaries, allowing them to control the pace and nature of their involvement in any activities or conversations which involves allowing for sufficiently long timeframes for engagement to allow flexibility.
 10. **Ongoing Support and Aftercare:** Provide continuous support, both during and after engagement, to ensure survivors have access to necessary resources and assistance as they navigate their healing journey.
 11. **Remunerated:** Victim-survivors are paid for their time and reimbursed for reasonable attendance costs to acknowledge the value of their expertise and to ensure they are never financially detrimentally impacted by their engagement.
 12. **Tailored Resources and Expectations:** Victim-survivors are given access to simple, age-appropriate, and accessible information to facilitate their meaningful contributions which involves setting clear expectations about their role and responsibilities (such as whether they are there to speak on behalf of themselves or their communities).

We emphasise that any engagements should be targeted to ensure that the topics of consultation do not ask victim-survivors to repeat contributions they have already made and are available through the Col outputs, and to avoid consultation fatigue. We also encourage the Committee to consider what diverse range of mechanisms they might adopt to ensure victim-survivors are able to engage in ways that suit their diverse needs. These could include, for example:

- Peer-led consultation circles
- Anonymous surveys and feedback tools
- One-on-one interviews or consultations
- Focus groups
- Storytelling and testimonial sharing
- Workshops and co-design sessions
- Community forums or public hearings

Such a diversity of engagement mechanisms is important in facilitating contributions from a diverse range of victim-survivors. Including diverse lived experiences is critical in ensuring that the implementation of the Col recommendations benefit all Tasmanians – regardless of background or experience. Intentional inclusion of diversity should be a priority for the Committee in this work, and we recommend contributions be sought from victim-survivors from backgrounds including, but not limited to people who are:

- 
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
 - Culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse
 - Disabled or have chronic health conditions
 - Neurodivergent
 - From low socio-economic backgrounds
 - LGBTQIA+
 - Younger and older
 - Sex workers
 - Migrant, refugees, and asylum seekers
 - Living in rural, regional, and remote areas
 - People with lived experience in the youth justice system, youth detention, out of home care, homelessness, and substance use
 - People with low levels of literacy or education

This work could happen by or in partnership with specialist services, like Laurel House, with appropriate funding to ensure we are not detracting from our service delivery requirements. Laurel House could fruitfully support the Committee in this work through, for example, designing or conducting engagements with or on behalf of the committee and supporting victim-survivors before, during, and after engagements.

We appreciate the Committee's time and consideration of these issues and would welcome future conversations where useful.

Warm regards,

Kathryn Fordyce

Chief Executive Officer

Ph: 0427 739 397

Email: kathryn.fordyce@laurelhouse.org.au

Web: www.laurelhouse.org.au