COMMUNITY DEMANDS ACTION ON WOMEN’S REFUGES

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More than 10,000 signatures will be presented to MPs on the steps of NSW Parliament today, amid widespread community concern about the closure of women’s refuges across the state.

SOS spokeswoman, Roxanne McMurray, said the signatures were a demand from the community that the Government allow debate on the important issue.

“We keep hearing from the Government that this is just a scare campaign. We received nearly 14,000 signatures from across NSW – are all of those people wrong?”

“The Government keeps saying no women’s refuges are closing, but that’s simply not the case.

“Women’s refuges across the state are being told to hand over their buildings and vehicles, let go of staff, get taken over by someone else offering a completely different service, and the Government says that’s not a closure?

“Many women’s refuges that are being taken over by faith-based organisations are still regarded as closures as they will not provide the same type of service, will often house women, men and families together and many will no longer operate 24/7.

Our latest analysis shows that of the women’s services that appear likely to continue, 74 percent will be run by religious organisations. In the past, it was a big problem and is a large part of the reason women’s refuges were set up in the first place. This is winding back the clock 40 years.

“For example they often don’t give women completely non-judgemental advice about contraception and sexual health.

“Domestic violence rates are going up not down – we don’t want women not seeking help because they can’t find a refuge run by women.

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Brought to you by SOS Women’s Services - a coalition of women and women’s services protecting the rights of homeless women and children in NSW.
The Manager of Marcia's Refuge in Campbelltown, Marilyn Fogarty, said their Aboriginal clients were deeply unhappy about the changes.

"Our refuge has been operating for 28 years and we help hundreds of women each year, but we're now being taken over by St Vincent De Paul. Aboriginal women won't seek help from a religious organisation because the Stolen Generations still resonates in their communities.

"We know religious organisations do a lot of good work, but there is no way the Government can say this refuge will be better run by a church-based group, or that they'll be able to build up the same strong links we have with the Aboriginal community.

"Our clients were extremely unhappy about signing over consent to the new provider, but if they refused, they'd end up homeless. They just didn't have a choice."

Gabrielle Powell from Bega said women-only services across NSW had been decimated

“Our local Member Andrew Constance claims the Bega Women’s Refuge was never closing – that we’re just running a scare campaign. But he suddenly found extra funds for Mission Australia to run a refuge after a huge community backlash, claiming the closure was just an "oversight."

“The Government keeps saying this is evidence-based, we'd like to see the evidence that this refuge will now be better run.”

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