

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Melbourne—Tuesday, 24 August 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Fiona Patten—Chair

Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

Ms Jane Garrett

Ms Wendy Lovell

Ms Tania Maxwell

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Rodney Barton

Ms Georgie Crozier

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Enver Erdogan

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Ms Sheena Watt

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Hope.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System.

May I first start by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the many and various lands that we are gathered on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families, and of course I want to welcome any elders or community members who are joining us today to provide information to the committee or who are online watching the proceedings. In fact I would like to welcome everyone who may be online watching these proceedings.

My name is Fiona Patten. I am the Chair of the committee. I am joined by Ms Tania Maxwell, Mr Ed O'Donohue, Ms Harriet Shing and Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela, and we also have our first witness, Hope.

Hope, can I just explain that all evidence today is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is provided under our *Constitution Act* but also the standing orders of the Legislative Council. This means that any information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say at this hearing, but if you were to go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by the same privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee could be considered a contempt of Parliament.

I know you have met some of the secretariat, and you also have Hansard in the background. They are recording everything here today, and they will provide you with a transcript. I would really encourage you to have a look at that transcript, because ultimately it will form part of our report and I just want to make sure that we do not misrepresent you or mishear you during this time.

We greatly appreciate you coming and joining us today and I think, honestly, the bravery in doing it. It is never easy to appear and talk about issues so personal to you. If you would like to make some opening remarks, we will then open it up to the committee to start a general discussion. Thanks, Hope.

Hope: Okay. Thanks. I have just typed up a small document.

The CHAIR: Lovely.

Hope: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Hope and I am a lived experience consumer representative and advocate for mental health. I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. In 2013 I reported the abuse, as you will see in my submission. My life changed in the 18 months post reporting. I lost 26 kilos in the six months leading up to court. My mental health spiralled downwards. I did not feel I could access support for fear a defence lawyer would access my records. I had a very game clinician say to me in the months afterwards, to stop my suicidal ideation years after court, 'Your experience in court, the social media verbal onslaught that also judged you, the anorexia that came with it and your anxiety in some ways was worse than this episode of sexual abuse you experienced at age 13 by the high-profile accused'. I somewhat agree with her. There was the retraumatisation from retelling the sexual abuse situation to police, then the court experience, the cross examination and being refused the one thing that assisted my testifying safely—the witness protection screen, which would have at least afforded me the same conditions as other victims who wish to be protected from the visible trauma of seeing their childhood sexual abuser again.

In 2019 I found out my accused, who had received a guilty verdict back in 2015 initially, then an appeal upheld, had written a memoir. In the memoir, which was repeatedly promoted on radio and online, it was mentioned that a handshake with the barrister representing the prosecution had occurred and some words were said by that prosecutor, and these were, 'The case should never have gone to court'. This occurred after the appeal was upheld. In regard to my second submission in July this year I found out that the accused, who had breached a five-year AVO previously, managed to convince a more senior prosecutor than the one prior—who had told him the matter was going to court in a prior conversation—to withdraw the charges, and at no stage up to six weeks later was I, the victim, informed of this decision. When I found out accidentally upon calling the court to

find out the time I was to appear, I was told. I had engaged the Orange Door organisation and Centacare to assist in remote testifying. They had spoken to the court and were also not informed that it was cancelled.

When I reread my two submissions last night a few things stood out to me: dreadful communication between services and the court. How can the victim negotiate and understand a system that is cancelling court cases without even informing services booking remote systems, without telling victims and explaining why this has occurred? We do not have a decent system that assists those with visible or psychosocial disabilities, who may well be articulate and who present well yet struggle with comprehension due to the way we process information. Support is needed prior, during and after court, not just a possible witness assistance person on the actual day. This is a particular issue with adult sexual abuse survivors trying to manage mental health, and I have yet to meet a survivor—and I know many—whose mental health is 100 per cent. This was the case with me, and I believe the police managed this very well in the 2015 court cases, until it went to court and it was managed poorly by the solicitors and the legal system—even telling me there was to be a *de novo* appeal. This was done with no support in place, on a Friday, late afternoon, with no checking that I had anyone who could support or organise a CASA worker for me.

We do not have a legal or court system that can support those who have suffered trauma—in fact, it is quite the opposite, which is a huge advantage to a defence team. There needs to be support before, during and after court to ensure a safe duty of care. The usual system for trauma-informed care is based on the four Rs: recognising how trauma affects people, recognising the signs of trauma, having a system that can respond to trauma and resisting retraumatisation. I believe we need far better victim management, and this was excellent within SOCIT, as in my first case in 2015. It was dreadful once it went to court and was managed legally, particularly in respect to knowing how ill I was becoming. In the AVO case I never heard from the informant in 2020 unless I had a question and contacted. I am aware eventually she went on maternity leave, and 2020 was a challenging year with COVID. I was not handed over to anyone, and when the case was withdrawn I was not told by the prosecutor who withdrew the charges.

You would have seen in the submission I went to huge lengths to try and find someone who would be accountable for the lack of a witness protection screen. In every letter I was stonewalled. I just wanted an apology or acknowledgement on how this had contributed to how I testified. Even the County Court could not be accountable for what occurred in their own court. I respectfully ask if the committee would consider as a recommendation to be employing trauma-informed care and a decent amount of support staff for victims during their court process. If judges, Crown prosecutors and in fact all court staff are given trauma-informed training, this would be a huge step in having a legal system that is slightly fairer to the victim. Given that adult trauma presentation is often a mental health issue, perhaps some decent federal or state budget might be considered. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much, Hope. We very much appreciate your opening statements. I just feel so much sympathy for what you have been through but also how brave you have been in just continuing on and advocating. So I am sure I speak on behalf of everyone in thanking you for the work that you have done personally. If I could start the questions: not being provided the screen—it just seemed to be kind of such a strange thing for a judge to not provide you with that opportunity to have the screen. Should we be recommending that if a victim asks for a screen, it should be provided in all circumstances?

Hope: Yes. I have the court transcript, and it was pushed quite hard by the barrister. He was quite aware of the law, and the judge was quite stubborn and just refused to provide the screen. He had never had one in his courtroom and he did not want one in his courtroom, and he was quite clear, His comments were quite misogynistic, quite rude, and it was quite shocking to read the court transcript. The barrister came back in the room and everyone was quite shocked. This had never occurred before. So it was an unusual situation. I believe that in general if a victim asks, they are provided with one. I do believe that is the case, but for some reason in my situation he would have preferred I use the remote testifying, and because I did not, he was quite annoyed.

The CHAIR: Right. So it might be that maybe judges should not be given that choice in the future.

Hope: Yes. There needs to be an understanding of that for some people. So in my situation, I have quite severe PTSD, and to be put in a room with no support and alone—some of my family were witnesses, so they could not support me. I did not want the rest my family hearing what my accused had done to me and what she had made me do to them, so I really tried to keep that quiet. I was very naive. I did not realise being high profile

it was actually going to hit the news anyway. But I was not comfortable with people knowing what had occurred, and I really wanted to go in alone. I felt quite safe with the detective that was in the room—in the courtroom—but I needed the screen to not see my accused. That was the situation I was safe with. It is different for everyone. Some survivors are quite happy to see their perpetrators. I do think if they ask, it needs to be respected without question. And it is in the legislation, it is part of the law, but it just was not followed in this case. It made a huge difference. In the first case I was able to testify very confidently and a guilty verdict was given.

The CHAIR: Yes. Thank you. I will come back if there is more time. I will go to Kaushaliya, then Tania, then Ed, then Harriet, then Sheena. Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Chair. Hope, my sympathies are with you. You mentioned the witness screen that was not provided to you. Are you aware of similar circumstances where other victims were not provided the witness screen as well?

Hope: No. The detective that managed the case had never heard of this ever happening before. I have never heard of it happening before. I have asked other survivors and I have never heard of this occurring before.

Ms VAGHELA: What I am understanding is that the accused was of a higher profile. Do you think that if the accused was not high profile the situation would have been different? Do you think then the witness screen would have been provided?

Hope: No. I do not think it had anything to do with that. I think it was the judge, actually. I think the judge in his comments—I did not know at the time what was going on, actually, because the barrister came back quite flustered. I think she was probably astounded that it had been refused. She did try quite hard to secure the screen. She pointed out to him that it was law, that it was mandatory. The words she used were that ‘it was mandatory’ that I be provided with the screen. He used words like, ‘This isn’t a greyhound track’. I do not know what the relevance was. He said, ‘The witness is in her 40s; she should be able to cope with this’—things like that. There was no understanding of the trauma it causes to recall sexual abuse as a child when you are an adult at all. There was no understanding. And he just basically said, ‘If she won’t remote testify, she’s not getting a screen’.

Ms VAGHELA: Thank you. I will come back if time allows in the second round.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tania Maxwell.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. Hope, it is lovely to see you, and thank you so much for providing your submission. Hope, just going back to the screen, do you think that this is one of the reasons that judges and magistrates should be trained in trauma-informed practice, so that they have a full understanding of the impact that that sexual abuse has on the victim?

Hope: I do, absolutely. I think defence lawyers have 100 per cent knowledge of the impact. I cannot understand why judges do not, but I certainly think defence lawyers do. In my first case the defence lawyer was trying to get me to move forward and break the contact. He was saying that he could not see me properly. I had a screen in place, and as I was moving the accused was also leaning forward to try to get a view of me. I understand there are courtroom tactics, but I also think defence lawyers are all over it. And most judges have been defence lawyers, so I do not understand why they seem to have forgotten that. But it is almost as if their knowledge of it is gone. I think that trauma-informed training would be really beneficial for them, yes.

Ms MAXWELL: Hope, you also spoke about little to no communication, whether it be with services and the courts or you and the courts, the DPP et cetera. What do you think would be required to be implemented to ensure that a victim is certainly kept informed of procedures that are going ahead?

Hope: Well, with the second submission it was appalling. I was not updated. I did not understand. It was a completely different procedure. It was an AVO breach. I was not informed of anything that was happening. There seemed to be multiple cases, and I was not understanding what they were for. It was never explained. The dynamics in that were that the accused had the informant’s email because he was representing himself, so there was a power imbalance there. I reported to one station. The informant moved to a different station and then went on maternity leave, and I did not know where my case was and who I was to ask any questions. I

think I had to contact the prosecutor, the head prosecutor in the regional town that I am living in, to ask, 'Am I even going to be required to testify? Because if that is the case, I'm going to be very anxious and not cope'. When they said, 'We're not going to have a case unless you testify, because the defendant is contesting', I had to put in place measures so that I could safely testify, and that required outsourcing to Centacare and Orange Door to work out how I could not go in a courtroom and remotely testify. So I brought in all these services. Now, they contacted the court, organised remote testifying, and when it was all cancelled, even within the services, this accused repeatedly contacted the prosecutor in the regional town I am in to try and get off his charges. They were not answering him because the emails were ridiculous, so he then went to the police commissioner. I am not sure who that was at the time; it would have been only about four months ago. He went to the police commissioner. They then contacted the regional town and said, 'Can you please email this person and answer them?'. The police commissioner contacted him, looked over the brief and said, 'I'm sorry. This is still going to court. It's a clear breach'. So then he came in for a matter conference with the prosecutor above this one—the head prosecutor in this town, who is now on 12 months leave—and he was able to get the charges dropped.

Now, even within that prosecuting unit, that head prosecutor did not tell the one below him, 'We're dropping the charges', so when I rang up the court, found out that it was dropped and then rang the prosecutor, I was dumbfounded. They were also astounded at how this could have occurred because they had not been told. So that is what I mean: nobody seems to talk to each other, even within their own unit of the prosecuting department. They were the ones that encouraged me to complain to the Professional Standards Command, which is now looking into this. And the paperwork that this man handed to this prosecutor has vanished, so charges cannot be reinstated. I went in for the breach in 2019, and because of COVID it is out of date.

So this accused just walks in, shows somebody a bit of paper and says, 'I'm being imitated. Somebody's pretending to be me online'. He has owned a computer shop and a phone shop. He is well aware of how to use technology and manipulate the system. No-one comes back to the victim and says, 'This is what's happening'. I could have said, 'He owned a phone shop and a computer shop. I think you should look into this a little further'. He gets off the charges, and then the paperwork disappears. It should not be that easy for an accused to do that, and had they even communicated that to me, I would have said to them, 'I think you need to look into it a little bit further'.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Hope.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ed O'Donohue.

Mr O'DONOHUE: Thanks very much, Chair. Hope, thank you for being prepared to speak to us today and for your courage in doing so. We greatly appreciate it and respect it. You have spoken about the police and how different parts of the police did not know what was going on, and once it moved from the informant to the courts you were dealt with differently and there were different processes. This is something which I am sure all of us on the call hear about the disconnect between different parts of the justice system. I suppose I would just invite you to talk further about that. It must be very difficult to have to re-tell your story and to brief different people all the time about what has taken place. Can you talk to what impact that has on you as a victim?

Hope: It is difficult. I think probably I was quite spoiled as far as dealing with the police with the first case. In 2015 I had a very supportive SOCIT worker. She checked up on my welfare quite a lot and was very supportive, so I suppose I was spoiled for any future dealings with the police. And when I reported the AVO, it went to a much more junior police officer. I am not saying that she was not doing her job well. She may well have been. Conditions were difficult in 2020. I reported in December 2019 and she moved stations, she went on maternity leave, she was not even there. I understand all of that, but I suppose how it makes me feel is that I just think I do not know why people bother reporting, because you just are not updated. Prior to that I had tried to report—I think maybe a year earlier. It was late in the day and I had quite a few breaches, and that police officer said, 'You've got so much. Do you want to come back tomorrow?'. And of course I did not go back. It took a lot of courage to go in in the first place. I did not go back. I had no idea that texts and emails and things had a time limit on them and they had worn out. I suppose you just think, 'This takes so much energy to do this that I will just leave it and hope they don't contact again. I hope the stalking will stop'. This is not an even an ex-partner. This is a community person who is another alleged survivor—and I will say 'alleged'. It is just really frustrating. You just think you can manage it yourself, and then when you go there you are not fully supported. And I understand there are time constraints with the police, but I think because I was so well

supported on one side—not the court side but with the first case—that is what made it so difficult with the IVO case. I just feel like I am not sure I would ever report a breach again; I would just leave it.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Harriet.

Ms SHING: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Hope, for actually having a really tough conversation, which is no doubt one of many, many, many conversations that you have had to have in retelling your story. I am really sorry about what happened to you, not just in relation to the offences but also as a result of the legal process. I hope you are getting the support that you need in terms of broader services and assistance for you.

I am keen to understand a little more about what you think—not just based on your own experience but in working with other people who have had similar experiences—would make a difference in training and professional development for magistrates, for judges, for court staff and for police around professional development in dealing with trauma-informed service delivery. What does that look like? How regularly would it occur in order to make a difference? How can that be built into the work that the court and judicial system do to actually be directly live to the situation that you have described as causing you so much pain and so much trauma?

Hope: I think trauma-informed care is really basic. I do not think it is that difficult. It is not done in mental health, which is bizarre. It is not done in hospitals. It is coming; I know that it is coming with mental health. People will be resistant, but it is coming, in Victoria anyway. It is just basically realising how trauma affects people, and that is not done. It is really not done, even as far as memories are recalled. You are giving a statement, and you go home. You have just given a statement, you go home. It is not that your memory recalls it in a fragmented way, it is that you go home, and then 5 hours later you remember something else.

So in my situation I think I gave three statements, and I had two lots of other abuse around this particular abuse. I had abuse prior and I had abuse afterwards that was much more severe than the abuse in the first submission that I am talking about. So when I started talking to the police about that, these things were clouding it, because the memories were getting really intense about that. So it is just being aware that whatever abuse or childhood situation you had occurring at that time that you were abused is all going to start being reactivated, and in talking about it you are retraumatising somebody. Now, that cannot not happen, because when you are giving a statement, it is going to happen regardless. So it is about putting in place the proper procedures and following up so that victim has those procedures in place.

I got told by the police—I understand this, and I appreciate it—‘We are not counsellors. Here’s a referral to CASA. This is their number’. After I reported, I was not really ready to talk to CASA. I went there and thought, ‘No, I’m not ready’. It was probably another 18 months before I linked with them, and then I really needed them. What I really needed was for them to come to court. They could not come to court, because how the system works is if they go to court and a defence lawyer finds out they are there, they will be called up as a witness and used against me. Basically you almost cannot get help as a victim, because if a defence lawyer finds out you are getting help, it will be used against you. I was aware of that, so I just did not get help. I think I was maybe 69 kilos, 67 kilos in April of 2015. By December I was 40 kilos when I testified. I could not eat. I could barely talk. My family was disintegrating. It was really difficult, because I was not getting the help that I needed.

So I think basically it is realising how it affects people, recognising the signs and trying not to retraumatise, but when that occurs with giving a statement, linking them in with the appropriate people. The best people who know how to deal with trauma-informed care are CASA workers, and whoever they are getting their training from is really good.

Ms SHING: Thank you very much, Hope. I really appreciate that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That was really helpful. Sheena Watt.

Ms WATT: Good morning, Hope. Thank you so much. I want to talk a little bit about the services around you. You mentioned CASA’s and others. Is there any sort of commentary that you might want to add about how those systems that support victims of crime and others might be improved?

Hope: Victims of crime can probably be improved in their language. Victims of crime is probably great, but the court system is interesting. So I have applied for only really counselling sessions through victims of crime. The whole victims of crime—one side of it, where you are getting help from a service, is fantastic and very helpful. When it goes to court—I suppose again I did not realise what the process was. It goes to court; somebody approves it. We recently applied for 10 more sessions. I did not apply until a couple of years after my court case. My psychiatrist in the region I am at said I specifically need EMDR help to try and process the trauma that I have, to stop the suicidality that I have, and in the area I was in there was nothing; I would need to go to Melbourne. I have trouble leaving my home, so that was not possible. So I just left it for a while, and then someone said there is a time limit, so I thought I had better get onto it. Then I did not use them for a while.

So 7.5 sessions per year over four years is what I have been given. When we applied for 10 more sessions, the language I received back on my VOCAT—I got it knocked back—was really interesting. It was like they had gone through all my history somewhere, I am not sure where, and basically said, ‘She’s used Medicare. She’s got so many mental health issues and had so much suicidality, and plus there’s been other abuse. We’re not paying for this anymore’. It was astounding. So we are appealing—it is not right the word; there is a word for it—in September, and I guess to me this particular case has caused so much trauma. When this person wrote a book and it came out and I had to go and investigate with the OPP why the prosecutor shook my accused’s hand and said it should not go to court, my father was so worried that I would attempt suicide again. He wanted me to go to the OPP. He wanted to be kept updated. I emailed him to update him immediately after the OPP meeting, which was with John Cain and three other solicitors. My father had a heart attack within two days. I do not know if he ever read this stuff. He died. He had a massive heart attack. The stress was phenomenal. He had not known. My family did not know I went through abuse, and they had put me in the place that had caused the abuse. So he felt some guilt, and he never really recovered from 2015 either. My mother never knew. She died 15 years ago. So I feel like 7.5 sessions a year is really just touching the sides, and if I happen to use Medicare sessions as well, so be it, to keep me alive. I do not know if that answered your question.

Ms WATT: I think there is something in that for us to explore and consider. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Hope. Good luck with that notice of variation. You are not the first person to raise this with us, so your words add to many other victims who have talked about the inadequacy of those sessions for victims. I wonder if you could speak more about what would have helped you and what we should be recommending around that assistance before you go to court, while you are in the court and, as you say, after that court process, if you have got some suggestions for us that we can look at recommending by way of that court support.

Hope: I have a lot of trouble comprehending information at times. I left school when I was 13 or 14, and the only reason I am articulate is that my parents instilled in me to read, and I am a passionate reader. Do I remember that book a week later? Probably not. But I have been told by my OT that my executive functioning does not work very well, so it is probably part of the PTSD. So I think that if you can tell people information in a couple of ways—sometimes we just get told very quickly, whether it is by police or solicitors, a piece of information and it looks like people are taking it in but they are not—perhaps if there is a way that we could email it, verbalise it and just make sure that people are taking these things in, because we are not. I struggle myself to take things in. I know certainly the SOCIT detective I had could tell that I was not taking things in. I do not know how many times she told me my accused was going to appeal. And I just thought, ‘No, she’s not going to appeal’. I just thought, ‘It’s going to be fine. She won’t appeal. She’ll get a guilty verdict because she did it. It’ll be fine’. And I needed things to be explained many times because I did not understand court. I thought I would report, they would question the accused and they would apologise for what they did. I kept saying, ‘They’ll fess up and apologise’. I even said to the police, ‘Can I sign something to say that I’m not going to sue them or anything prior?’, and they just looked at me like I was insane. And they said, ‘It has to go to court if they’re guilty’. Everything has to go to court. And I just thought, ‘I don’t want to go to court. That’s not what I want’.

The CHAIR: Yes, right.

Hope: I had been told it was high profile. I could not understand why it was, because the accused was quite a bit older than me, and I did not know what that meant for me. It was not explained at all, what that meant. In the age of social media it was apparent that meant that I was going to be verbally abused for a really long time. My family was going to see that. It was going to affect my kids. My kids are older, so it was going to affect my

kids. It was really difficult. So I think right from the start they need to explain all of that. In fact I probably would have liked the stats on how many people get a guilty and do not. I looked into that afterwards and it made me feel a lot better.

The CHAIR: Yes. And as you say—I do not have time to explore this; I would love to further—if there was an alternative to going to court that was around just providing you with what you needed, that may have been a better option. And we hear that a lot in sex offences, that the whole process is almost more harmful than the crime itself.

Hope: Oh, definitely. Definitely. I felt that for me. And I did not want punishment as such. I actually wanted to know why I had been chosen, why I was the victim. I still wanted to know that. I explored it for five years, and I came to a conclusion. And I have accepted it—I have got acceptance over that now, and I am okay with what occurred, as in my acceptance of it. I do not really forgive, but I have acceptance. So that is what I needed. And if I could have talked to the person, even if they could have got a guarantee, ‘We’re not going to lock you up if you can just talk to the victim and say why you did it’, that would have been okay for me. Some people want jail; I did not need that.

The CHAIR: Yes. Can others just put up their hand if they have questions? I will go to Tania. Thank you.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. Hope, you have certainly provided us with some fantastic insights into what perhaps could have improved the situation for you. Talking about when you have been interviewed or spoken to people and you go away and think about it and often there are times when you cannot remember things, do you think that for victims of these crimes there should be recordings that you are actually able to take away with you so when you get home and you are in your safe place you can actually go through in a relaxed, safe environment to actually take on board and hear and understand what has been asked of you or what information has been given to you? Is that something that would help?

Hope: Do you mean when you are giving your statement to police, for example?

Ms MAXWELL: Yes, or even if you are in an interview with SOCIT—you are talking to SOCIT and they are telling you things and it can be really difficult to absorb all that information, so then you leave. Would a recording or a transcript or something be helpful in those situations for victims?

Hope: Yes. But I did get given a transcript, so I was given a statement. I put the statement in a locked area, and I did not want my family to find out what the abuse was. So it took the police about 18 months to tell me that I needed to re-read the statement and find it, and I did not want to look at it. I had physical reactions every time I got to the bit of the abuse. I went straight into fight or flight. I actually wanted to run. I am not a runner. I am fit but I am not a runner. I actually wanted to run. I definitely think you need to leave with something, because you have got a defence lawyer who has got a copy of that so you definitely need to have it. It should be given to everybody who gives a statement. I am surprised if people do not get given it. I did not know that you were meant to be given it, but I was just given it automatically, and I found it very difficult to read.

The CHAIR: Yes, of course. Thank you. Harriet.

Ms SHING: Thank you, Chair. I will be very quick, given the time. Hope, just going back to the uncertainty and the trauma that the process and lack of clarity had for you in this matter: do you think, in your lived experience view and also in relation to the advocacy that you have done for others, that a session with victim-survivors around process—for example, delivered centrally by CASA or by another provider—would help in providing a better line of sight over legal process and what that looks like? Would that have made a difference to you in the level of comfort perhaps that you felt about the legal process were something like that to occur?

Hope: Definitely. Definitely. I recently met a victim who has only just given her statement to police. She has got quite a few mental health issues and she said, ‘I will have to say I’ve got mental health issues to remote testify. I’ve got childhood sexual abuse’. And I said, ‘You don’t need to say that. You can remote testify without saying that. Don’t say that. Please don’t say that. If you say that, a defence lawyer is going to use that’. And then I got the legislation for her where it says you can have a protection screen. I think that information should be available for all. It took me five years to get that information from an extremely helpful person who has given me a lot of help.

Ms SHING: So if that were set out in a uniform way to anyone who has a complaint or is as a victim-survivor engaging with the legal service—so not specific to your case, but as a general overview of the system—do you think that would help?

Hope: Yes. I mean, I had seen it before that you were allowed to have a witness screen, but this victim actually thought she needed to have a disability to have it. For some reason she thought she needed to admit to a disability to have it, and I said, ‘You don’t need to. It’s okay’. So I think all those things are important. I do not know. I think there needs to be a way that people can get help without a defence lawyer finding out as well. I do not think it should be their right to grab all your medical information. It is always going to be traumatising to bring up childhood abuse of any kind when it is going to court as an adult, and you should have the right to privacy.

Ms SHING: Thank you, Hope.

The CHAIR: Yes. Look, on behalf of all of us, thank you so much for coming to speak to us today. It has been incredibly informative, and I think this will stay with us. We are fairly early on in the inquiry, but your evidence and testimony and submissions will really help us in looking forward to how we can affect change. Whether that is education, support or further assistance, you have been really clear in articulating that. So on behalf of us, and I think on behalf of the community, thank you so much for appearing before us, Hope.

Hope: That is okay. Thanks for having me.

The CHAIR: As I mentioned, you will receive a transcript of today. Do not lock it in a box. Have a look at it and if we have misheard you, please let us know.

Hope: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The committee will just take a short break until 10.30. Thanks, everyone.

Ms SHING: Thank you, Hope. Take care.

Hope: Thank you.

Witness withdrew.