

## Labor Women's Caucus 59<sup>th</sup> Parliament

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Parliament of Victoria  
Electoral Matters Committee  
Parliament House Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

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30 September 2020

Dear Electoral Matters Committee

### **Impact of Social media on Victorian Elections and Victoria's Electoral Administration**

I am pleased to make this submission to the Committee's inquiry into the *Impact of Social media on Victorian Elections and Victoria's Electoral Administration* on behalf of the Victorian Labor Women's Caucus.

An online social media presence is a vital part of political participation and elections in Victoria. Candidates and members of parliament rely predominantly on social media platforms to engage with their communities, communicate their political intentions and agendas, and express their views on a range of matters.

However, with an increasingly digitalised age, and an increasing reliance on social media platforms, we have seen an alarming rise in online sexist abuse and attacks, harassment, and cyber violence that is targeted specifically at women and girls. And for women in politics, the online violence and trolling against them is a global phenomenon.

According to the UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, "*When women suffer this violence online, the aim is no different than offline – to control, assert power over, silence, and keep women out of the conversation or from participating and benefitting equally from that space.*"

In this regard, we believe that gendered online abuse has the very real potential to dissuade and deter women from participating in the political process all together. And when women's political participation is restricted, and when women are prevented from exercising their political rights, we have a denial of democracy.

This was identified by Dr Kim Barker and Dr Olga Jurasz in their online blog entitled (Gendered Misinformation & Online Violence Against Women in Politics: Capturing Legal Responsibility?) They write:

"The rise in the online abuse of women and gendered misinformation has significant implications for women withdrawing from public life – both offline and online. Furthermore, the scale and everyday occurrence of these phenomena has a silencing effect on women as well as girls, with many feeling they cannot freely express themselves online. This raises

significant concerns from the perspective of gender equality and ensuring women’s equal rights to participate in public life – in accordance with states’ international obligations under Article 7 of the *UN Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in political and public life.”

Set out in the **Appendix** are examples of social media comments posted on the facebook accounts of some members of the Victorian Labor Women’s Caucus.

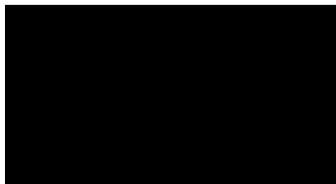
These are certainly not isolated comments. We know that online violence and trolling against women and women in politics is a worldwide phenomena. And whilst social media is a very useful tool for members of parliament, to directly communicate and engage with our constituents, it provides a forum where violence can proliferate with absolute impunity.

We have experienced it. We have seen varying degrees of abuse from the gender stereotypes to threats of rape and death. We know that social media can be a hostile place for women in politics. And we know that anonymity and impunity make it difficult to police and prevent.

Online sexism, harassment and threats can also distract members of parliament from their work and directly undermine their status as leaders in the community. Indeed, online gendered abuse has the capacity to influence the way we, as members of parliament, express ourselves on social media. And this in turn can impact the way we connect with our constituents.

We thank the Committee for undertaking this important work into the impact of social media on Victorian elections. We submit that any such inquiry should take account of the online gendered abuse directed at women members of parliament and the impact this has on political participation by women in Victorian.

Yours faithfully (on behalf of the Labor Women’s Caucus)

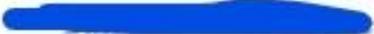


**Sonya Kilkenny MP**

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**APPENDIX**

  Currently watching you debate. Not sure who you sucked off to get into seat but politics isn't for you.

 · Unhide · Message · 1 w  1

COMMENTED

In a pandemic lockdown you have the gall to be out driving back and forwards.... just for the shit of it?

Police prosecution coming your way, bitch! · 2:09 pm

 20+ others also commented

  This Coronavirus isn't killing enough women.

 · Unhide · Message · 17w

1 d Like Reply

 She can get stuffed I'll fix her up

2 h Like Reply 😂 1

 Write a comment...  

2 d Like 



Her family doesnt need 2 cars.  
She got a broom stick lol

2 d Like 😂👍❤️ 9





11:57

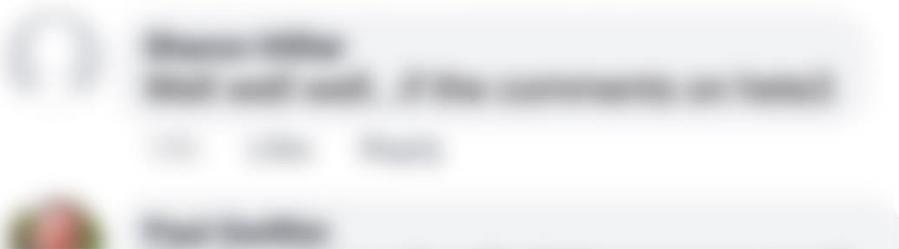
you are so full of shit!!! leave are children alone!!!! disgusting excuse for a human being. let alone a mother..

20h Like Reply



**Dogs that bite need a bullet**

20h Like Reply  1



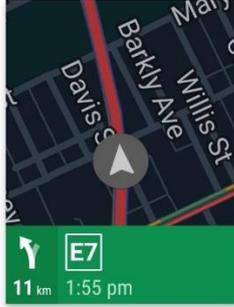
**Silly ,dumb,stupid woman..I hope she enjoys what little time she has left in govt**

5h Like Reply

Write a comment...  



17h Like  
There you go...Little Red Riding Bitch



[Blurred text]

Yesterday at 5:14 pm • Like • 7

[Blurred profile picture]  
mutton dressed up as lamb !!

Yesterday at 5:17 pm • Like • 1

[Blurred text]