

MEDIA RELEASE

SEXUAL CONSENT AMENDMENT BILL TO BE TABLED IN THE ASSEMBLY

Labor backbencher and Member for Murrumbidgee, Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, will introduce her Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill 2022 to the ACTs Legislative Assembly during this week's sittings.

Dr Paterson released an Exposure Draft for public comment on Monday 21 June 2021. Over the four-week period of consultation, formal submissions and online commentary provided overwhelming support for the proposed changes. Dr Paterson also met with key stakeholder groups and presented to the ACT Governments Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) working group on Law Reform.

"There has been overwhelming support for legislative change and, in particular, the introduction of an affirmative model of sexual consent in the ACT" Dr Paterson said.

"The level of sexual violence in the community is unacceptable and this reform is a critical step in delivering justice to victims and survivors of sexual violence. Together with community education and awareness, these reforms will help us transition to a society where healthy, respectful relationships form the basis of sexual activity, and where consent must be given, and is not to be presumed".

"I have carefully considered community and stakeholder input, and similar legislative amendments which have recently been passed in NSW. Accordingly, I've made some edits to this Bill which further strengthen its provisions. I wish to thank everyone who has taken the time to review the draft materials and provide considered comment on this important issue" Dr Paterson said.

"I speak directly to victim/survivors – I am so sorry for what you have experienced. I will work tirelessly to ensure this Bill passes and that the law explicitly states that sexual consent must be free and voluntary, and it must be communicated – otherwise, it is sexual assault" Dr Paterson said.

ACT sexual assault victim-survivor and Global Institute of Women's Leadership Visiting Fellow, **Ms Brittany Higgins**, offers her support for these reforms, stating that "today marks a turning point for the ACT. We have a chance to address the systemic issue of sexual violence and improve access to justice for all victim-survivors.

"This is an acknowledgement that we are all responsible to seek enthusiastic consent. Someone isn't saying 'yes' just because they don't say 'no' or do not physically resist.

"Victim-survivors have lived silently with the trauma of sexual violence for too long. These reforms will seek to deliver systemic reform that will assist them in getting the justice they deserve".

Outgoing Australian of the Year, **Ms Grace Tame**, has also offered her support for Dr Paterson's Bill and will be in Canberra for a joint address with Ms Brittany Higgins to the National Press Club on Wednesday 9 February.

Dr Paterson welcomes further community education and awareness campaign, stating: "in parallel with these important law reforms, the ACT Government's SAPR program will ensure broad and targeted community education about healthy, respectful relationships". This program of work is being coordinated by Minister Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Women and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

After tabling the Bill this week, it will be referred to the Assembly's Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. The Bill will be debated, and a vote conducted as to whether to pass the Bill and enact the new laws.

Full details: <https://marisapaterson.com.au/issues/sexual-violence/crimes-consent-amendment-bill-2022/>