

16 October 2018

Gender Equality Unit
Office for Women
Department of Health and Human Services
50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Dear Office for Women

Gender Equality Bill exposure draft

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) welcomes the opportunity to give feedback on the key elements in the Exposure Draft of the Gender Equality Bill.

The MAV has played an active role in facilitating local government participation in the development of the Gender Equality Bill thus far. We are committed to continuing to work with the State Government in progressing gender equality in Victoria, and to support councils in the implementation of the Bill.

Working with and alongside local government is critical to achieving the aims of the Gender Equality Bill, and *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* recognises the importance of partnering with councils to achieve gender equality. The MAV has consistently kept the local government sector informed of the progress of the Bill, and has encouraged local government participation in the consultation process. Three consultations were held with councils and the Department of Health and Human Services at the MAV in January this year, with representation from 72 councils. In addition to this, the MAV has kept councils abreast of developments via communications with Human Services Directors, Human Resources Managers, prevention of violence against women contacts, and through regular e-news and bulletin items.

The MAV has a long and proud history of supporting gender equality initiatives, and recognises the link between gender inequality and violence against women. Councils have been engaged in this work, and over the past decade have made significant progress towards gender equality. In 2012, the MAV published a Leadership Statement confirming our commitment to supporting councils to promote gender equity and prevent violence against women. In 2015, the MAV emphasised the importance of addressing gender inequality in preventing men's violence towards women in giving evidence and its submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and recognised the important role councils have to play in primary prevention. Our submission to the development of the Gender Equality Strategy in 2016 identified that generational change is needed to achieve gender equality, and that, as the closest tier of



government to the community, local government is uniquely positioned to play a leading role and be a partner in this endeavour. As a conduit to local government and the legislated peak body and representative for all 79 councils, the MAV also actively participates in the Family Violence Steering Committee, the Ministerial Prevention Taskforce and the Gender Auditing Working Group.

The MAV has a long-standing commitment to increasing the number of women standing for council. In 1997, the MAV worked with key local government women's organisations to develop and launch the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter for councils to sign up to. The three principles to the Charter are gender equity, diversity and active citizenship. To date, 72 of Victoria's 79 councils have endorsed the Charter, with many creating action plans to ensure councils walk the talk of gender equity, diversity and active citizenship. The Charter acknowledges local government capacity, as the tier of government closest to communities, as being in a unique position to contribute to the global goal of gender equality for women. The Charter recognises the need for increased participation of women in key decision making forums so that decision-making more clearly represents and reflects the interests and demographics of communities. The introduction of the Gender Equality Bill will provide an impetus for councils to reaffirm their commitment to the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter.

There are more women elected to local government in Victoria than in any other state or territory. Whilst it is pleasing to see progress being made, further concerted effort is required to lift representation to 50/50 as outlined in *Safe and Strong*. Since 2000, the number of women being elected to council had stagnated around the 26-28% mark. State Government funding assistance, however, enabled both the MAV and VLGA to strategically engage with women and encourage them to stand for council. The impact of this investment is evident in the dramatic increase that has eventuated since and it is also the first time that every Victorian is represented by a local government with at least one woman councillor.

In 2000	2012 Elections	2016 Elections
26.6% female councillors	34% female councillors	38% female councillors
19% female mayors	26% female mayors (2014)	41% female mayors (2017)
5 councils without a female councillor	0 councils without a female councillor	0 councils without a female councillor
24 councils with 1 female councillor	10 councils with 1 female councillor	13 councils with 1 female councillor
9 councils with 40%+ female councillors	28 councils with 40%+ female councillors	14 councils with a majority female councillors

The release of *Safe and Strong* and the introduction of the Gender Equality Bill both provide a valuable platform for encouraging greater representation of women in civic leadership roles. We highly recommend the State Government considers further investment in a similar program to that of 2010 in the lead up to the 2020 election, recognising that there is still a long way to go in delivering on the 50/50 target as outlined in *Safe and Strong*.

In accordance with Recommendation 94 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, councils are required to report on the measures they propose to take to reduce family violence and meet the needs of victims in their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans, developed every four years. In addition to this, proposed changes to the Local Government Act would require council Chief Executive Officers to develop and maintain a workforce plan that sets out

measures to seek to ensure gender equity, diversity and inclusiveness. The development of gender equity plans, proposed for public sector organisations in the Gender Equality Bill Exposure Draft, would increase local government reporting requirements on gender equity measures. While the MAV acknowledges and champions the importance of transparency and accountability, we would caution that any reporting should not be overly cumbersome, and does not dually capture data and information already reported by councils under other regulatory frameworks. The MAV would therefore appreciate further discussion on the proposed plans and reporting requirements.

While Victorian councils have played a leading role in working with their communities to prevent family violence, adequate support and guidance that recognises the varying levels of readiness across the state is required to enable councils to develop and deliver on gender equity action plans.

The MAV commends the efforts of the State in establishing Australia's first Gender Equality Bill, and recognises the important leadership role that the State Government has to play in role-modelling the implementation of this work across different departments and with the broader Victorian community.

Should you have any queries about this matter, please contact Kellie Nagle, Preventing Violence Against Women Policy Adviser, 03 9667 5585 or knagle@mav.asn.au.

Yours sincerely



KERRY THOMPSON
Chief Executive Officer

Encl:

[MAV Leadership Statement](#)

[Victorian Local Government Women's Charter](#)

[Family Violence and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Planning – guidance for local government](#)