

## **Conference Opening Address**

### **Speaker - The Hon. Rod Welford – Attorney General, Queensland**

I acknowledge judicial officers, other VIPs, and guests. I appreciate opportunity to be here today to mark the opening of the Domestic Violence Court Assistance Network Pre Conference Training Day.

Many of you work in locations where contact with other DV support workers is not always possible - this conference provides a great opportunity to share your experiences and develop better ways to assist your clients.

The Magistrates Courts have a good relationship with DV support groups, both in the day to day operation of courts and with the DVCAN.

As we are all aware, recent amendments to the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989* have commenced, extending protection to a range of people abused in non-spousal domestic relationships, as well as spousal relationships. Safety is a key element of the legislation.

Domestic Violence Protocols have been developed by my Department in consultation with court staff and the community. They represent practice standards for providing safety, information and support in Magistrates Courts Registries to court assistance workers and all domestic violence clients, whether they are the aggrieved or the respondent.

In regard to these protocols, an extensive training program for courthouse staff throughout Qld was undertaken late last year and earlier this year. Court staff received information regarding the new amendments to the legislation, and training in the DV Protocols in their work. In some areas some court assistance workers were included in this training.

I want to acknowledge the valuable contribution of court assistance workers for the skilled assistance they provide to aggrieved persons in the court process. Our court staff are encouraged to develop a close working relationship with court assistance workers. Importantly, a number of courts are involved in the establishment of Integrated or Coordinated Community Responses to domestic violence. Research and experience has found that coordinated responses are more effective in promoting safety.

While many courts have the facilities to provide safe rooms, these facilities are not available in every court. Recently, I asked for an audit to be conducted of all courts. This will enable the Government to look at those courts where we need to improve facilities, specifically for vulnerable witnesses and people involved in domestic violence. I want to assure court assistance workers that the provision of appropriate safe rooms is a priority.

Whenever new courthouses are built or existing courthouses refurbished, safe rooms are being provided.

I understand that this is the 4<sup>th</sup> State-wide conference for Domestic Violence Court Assistance Workers. There is a very impressive list of speakers and I wish you well.