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Unions push for the right to domestic violence leave

Unions are pushing to give millions of Australian workers the right to access domestic violence leave.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said paid domestic violence leave is designed to support victims of domestic violence and help them to keep their job.

“Having a job is critical if women are to leave a violent relationship. Domestic violence is not - and should not - be a private matter that is dealt with behind closed doors.” Ms Kearney said.

The ACTU is making a claim to the Fair Work Commission for ten days paid domestic violence leave for permanent staff and ten days unpaid leave for casuals to be included in all awards.

Ms Kearney said one in three Australian women experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

“It is a systemic issue involving a wide range of social, economic and cultural factors that must be addressed in the public sphere – including workplaces,” Ms Kearney said.

“Having access to domestic violence leave means victims have time to attend court appearances and related appointments, seek legal advice and make relocation arrangements.

“Evidence shows having an income gives women choice, stops them becoming trapped and isolated in violent and abusive relationships, and enables them to care for their children and provide them with a safe home environment.”

ABS figures show that two thirds of the 400,000 plus people who experience domestic violence each year are in paid employment.

“Paid domestic violence leave recognises that employees experiencing domestic violence often have a history of broken employment, are on lower incomes in casual and part-time jobs and can least afford to take unpaid leave at a time when financial security is critical,” said Ms Kearney.

The ACTU claim also includes the right to request a change in working arrangements, such as start and finish times.

“Stalking is one of the risk factors that can lead to a domestic violence victim being killed, and almost all women with violent partners who stalk them also experience harassment at their workplace,” said Ms Kearney.

“Providing flexibility around working hours will help make the workplace safer for everyone.”

Over 1.6 million employees now have access to paid domestic violence leave in union negotiated workplace agreements.

Ms Kearney said extending this to all modern awards will provide a safety net for millions of workers.

The ACTU claim for domestic violence leave will be lodged in the Fair Work Commission on Tuesday 28 October as part of the review of modern awards currently underway.

Media contact: Carla De Campo, 0410 579 575