



TASSO SUBMISSION

Strengthening Our Responses to Family Violence in
Tasmania

We're in this together.

***We speak as a proud voice for families within the
Tasmanian State School community to
make sure their needs and ideas are heard.***

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations pays respect to the Palawa people as the Traditional Custodians and first educators of the land in beautiful Lutruwita.

We pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge their deep connection to country.

We also express our gratitude that we share this land today, our sorrow for some of the costs of that sharing, and our hope and belief that we move to a place of equity, justice, and partnership together.

Acknowledging Parents

TASSO acknowledges parents and caregivers as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and honour the diversity of families and recognise the vital role family and community play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys.

TASSO prepared this submission with consideration of feedback provided by Tasmanian parents and caregivers. We extend our appreciation to all who have shared their experiences and engaged with our Organisation.

A note on language: Throughout this paper, we use the term *parent* to refer to a child's primary caregiver. We acknowledge that this role is fulfilled by a wide range of people, including carers, guardians, kinship carers and other family members.

Acknowledging Funding

TASSO is supported by funding provided by the Department for Children and Young People (DECYP).

Background

Who is TASSO?

The Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO) is the peak body representing the parents and community who form School Association within Tasmanian government schools.

We work to empower the heart of Tasmanian state schools – their community – by supporting School Associations through their committee.

Our work includes providing essential training, resources, and support to school committees. Most importantly, we help them meet their constitutional requirements, support office-bearers in their roles and facilitate valuable networking opportunities, so together the School Association can do great things.

We represent the School Association Committees from within Tasmania's 125 Primary Schools (Kindergarten to Year 6), 29 High Schools (Year 7 – 12), 25 District Schools (Kindergarten to Year 12), 8 Colleges (Year 11 and 12) and 3 Support Schools.

At TASSO, we believe in the value of government education. We are committed to making sure that state school education in Tasmania delivers the best possible education for Tassie kids. We speak as a proud voice for families to make sure their needs and ideas are heard.

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Systems abuse through school communication and education settings

We wish to raise a significant gap in the discussion paper regarding the use of everyday government systems, in our context - schools, as a tool of ongoing coercive control and post-separation abuse.

Schools are one of the most consistent points of contact between separated parents. For many families affected by family violence, school communication channels, enrolment processes, consent forms, wellbeing supports and daily operational decisions can become mechanisms through which abuse continues. This is evident where one parent uses school processes to harass, undermine or control the other parent, often under the guise of parental rights or engagement.

Examples reported to our organisations and member communities include:

- Repeated or vexatious complaints to school leadership about the other parent.
- Misuse of school email or messaging platforms to send hostile, intimidating or manipulative communication.
- Attempts to influence school staff perceptions of the victim-survivor.
- Demands for excessive information that compromise the safety or privacy of the victim-survivor.
- Refusal to consent to reasonable supports such as counselling, learning adjustments or wellbeing services for the child.
- Pressure on schools to provide information or access that is inconsistent with the spirit of safety arrangements, including family violence orders.
- Escalation of complaints, aggressive correspondence or threats directed at principals and senior staff when boundaries are set, resulting in significant time being diverted from educational leadership to managing conflict, risk and safety concerns.

We are also concerned about administrative and system failures that directly compromise safety, including instances where confidentiality requests are not consistently applied across school systems. Families have reported situations where, through validation processes or human error, private address or contact details have been disclosed to an abusive parent, placing victim-survivors and children at risk.

There are also significant gaps in how schools manage communication with separated families.

We are particularly concerned about the continued use of paper-based validation and administration processes in schools, such as book day order forms, student information updates, excursion permissions and contact detail confirmations. These forms are often pre-filled with sensitive personal information, including student details, parent names, home addresses, phone numbers and emergency contacts. In many cases, these forms are distributed or collected in ways that do not involve any verification of identity, meaning a person other than the intended recipient can access, view or collect personal information simply by presenting at the school or through the child. For families impacted by family violence, this creates a serious and foreseeable safety risk. It allows an abusive parent, or any third party, to potentially obtain confidential information that schools may otherwise have been asked to withhold. This is not simply an administrative issue; it is a privacy and safety concern, and current processes unintentionally undermine confidentiality requests while exposing schools and families to risk.

Many school systems also do not adequately support split family arrangements, resulting in:

- Both parents receiving access to sensitive information such as physical addresses and phone numbers when this is unsafe.
- Critical information (reports, permission forms, enrolment information, subject selection, booklists, transition to high school or college) being sent to only one parent, leaving the other excluded from their child's education.
- Inconsistent practices across schools, creating confusion, inequity and additional stress for families already managing complex circumstances.

Schools and teachers are often placed in these situations without adequate training or guidance in family violence-informed practice. This can result in unintended harm, such as:

- Well-meaning comments or classroom practices reinforcing harmful narratives about parenting capacity (e.g. assumptions about home reading or engagement).
- Billing practices that ignore court-ordered cost sharing arrangements.
- Expectation that parents must communicate directly with each other, even where parallel parenting arrangements are in place due to safety concerns.
- Lack of practical support for schools to act as intermediaries in communication where direct contact between parents is unsafe.

As a result, schools are often operating as de facto frontline responders in family violence contexts, without the frameworks, protections or resourcing afforded to other parts of the system.

This aligns directly with the paper's definition of systems abuse as the misuse (or unintended operation) of systems designed to support others, resulting in harm to victim-survivors and their children. Yet schools are not acknowledged in the paper as a setting where systems abuse can and does occur.

We believe education settings must immediately be recognised as part of the broader family violence response system. This includes acknowledging the risk of systems abuse occurring through schools and equipping education systems with appropriate guidance, safeguards and support.

If the intent of this reform process is to reduce systems abuse and strengthen victim-survivor safety, then schools and education systems must be explicitly included in the conversation.

Recommended actions

1. Recognising schools as part of the family violence response ecosystem, including acknowledging that systems abuse can, and does, occur through school processes and communications.
2. Clear guidance for schools on managing family violence contexts, including communication where FVOs exist, high-conflict or parallel parenting situations, and always prioritising child safety over competing parental demands.
3. Family violence-informed training for school leaders and relevant staff, covering coercive control, systems abuse, misidentification risk, trauma-informed practice and safe information sharing.
4. Stronger safeguards within school systems and administration, including:
 - Robust confidentiality controls
 - Safer handling of personal information
 - Better support for split family arrangements
 - Platforms that do not default to privileging one parent where this creates risk
 - Accountability measures for breeches of policy
5. Development of modern communication platforms that reflect contemporary family structures, enabling joint and equitable access to education information

for diverse families (including separated, blended, kinship and shared-care families) without compromising safety.

6. Recognition of the workload and safety impact on school leaders and staff, with access to escalation pathways, specialist advice and appropriate support.