

**Remarks by Jessica Bowes, domestic violence survivor and advocate**

**Women's Aid UN Day Seminar on Femicide and Domestic Violence**

**Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018**

My name is Jessica Bowes, I'm a mother of three from Dublin and I am a women's aid service user.

I'd like to thank Margaret Martin from Women's Aid for inviting me to speak here today, it's extremely difficult for all of us here in this room to listen to and hear the devastating figures relating to Femicide, and I know that some of you here have lost loved ones. Some of you have lived through DV and while there are some of you who have no first-hand experience of DV, every one of us here have one thing in common, we all have a desire for change.

On behalf of women who I hope to represent today I want to thank each and every one of you in attendance for your participation and your dedication to making Ireland a safer place for women. And in particular I'd like to thank the Garda Commissioner for attending here today, the fact that you are in attendance today is huge for me personally.

When you were appointed to the role of GC I googled you to get a sense of what you were like, like everyone I was curious about what kind of police officer you were, what kind of leader you were.

It became very clear very quickly that at the heart of what you do, your priority is keeping people safe and holding those who threaten that safety accountable. You once said "Crime is not like rain, it does not fall evenly on us all. Crime is particularly hard and particularly prevalent on those who are vulnerable in our society,"

I know you have made great strides through your work with the PSNI to help vulnerable groups, like women and children who are struggling against the odds to escape DV. I have no doubt that you will be a driving force of change and that your experience and leadership will be a turning point for how domestic violence is policed here.

I have been advocating for change in how DV is policed since my assault in Dec 2015, after 5 years of physical, mental, financial and emotional abuse I was almost killed by my violent ex.

We had been together for five years on and off, mostly off, at the start of the relationship things were good. I loved him very much and I was excited about our future together. But soon after I announced my pregnancy he completely changed, he became emotionally abusive to me, he made me hide my bump, he told me I was disgusting, he was unbelievably cruel to me and I started to wilt, my confidence was gone. I lived in a constant state of confusion and crisis, trying desperately to figure out why my world had been turned upside down.

He never liked living in my home so in an effort to improve things we rented a house together, it was a beautiful detached five bedroom house and this was going to be a NEW START. But I had no one around me and I soon realised that I was in terrible danger.

Isolated in my new home. The violence ramped up in severity and frequency and I began to fear for my life. His assaults became more vicious and he had started to do things he'd never done before.

He pulled the fuses from my car engine so I couldn't leave the house, he split my head open and refused to take me to the hospital despite me having a blood disorder at the time. He bit my face in front of the kids and chased me through the house with no regard for the children. He wouldn't pay a bill, I became financially responsible for everything. He was never there for me or the kids he'd go missing for weeks at a time. Come back and hit me for asking where he'd been.

I felt like things had gone too far. I didn't want to be there, I knew I was in danger. I had lost the safety of living in my home, and so I applied for a barring order as his name was on the lease.

Within 24 hours of getting my order he had breached it by breaking into the house despite a stern warning from the judge, I called the guards but they refused to arrest him, they made me wait outside my gate, I rang the Sargent, he came to the house and still there was no arrest!

He was laughing at me in front of them. I was gutted, he had already threatened my family so the guards were my only option in terms of asking for help and they didn't seem to care, I had no one to help me. He wreaked havoc on me and would say RING THE GARDA, you're a rat, it was just a joke to him, the barring order was useless he said, it wasn't worth the paper it was printed on, I tried on a number of occasions to call the Gardaí, he pulled me out of a clinic in the hospital where I worked and threatened me with a blade, it took the guards three hours to come find me and even then they

told me he hadn't breached the order because he was in a public place, but what about the assault , they didn't even take a statement!

I would later learn that some of my incidents weren't being recorded on the PULSE system.

In time I went back to the safety of my own home, I ended the relationship and he met someone new but he hadn't gone away.

He was still sending me flowers and I LOVE YOU balloons, he was monitoring my house, driving by at night and in the early hours of the morning, checking to see if I had any house guests, but we had no contact and I was happy to get on with my life, go to work, look after my kids, I joined a gym. I was happy without him.

Some time passed and he started to contact me, I was civil with him as we had family law matter pending and I had no desire to upset him. He was civil in return and for a short period we were getting on and making plans to co parent.

Then history began to repeat itself, he told me that he missed me, he missed the kids, he had made a huge mistake, he wasn't happy, he wanted to come home, he had realised how much he loved me thorough our separation, he had heard that I had moved on, I hadn't, but he seemed devastated by the thoughts of this.

I made it clear in the nicest possible way that I didn't want to work things out with him that I was happy on my own, that we could never work it out there was too much history!

Then the texts turned to phone calls and he started to become quiet persistent, ignoring his efforts didn't work in fact it made things worse, he began to get upset , WHY ARE YOU SUCH A BITCH , ANSWER MY CALLS , he was getting desperate , he showed up at my house , blocked my car in the drive , he followed me around in traffic , he came to the school , he came to my job , he was relentless !

Then came the emotional black mail , I can't live without you , please don't do this to me , he sent me pictures of his bloodied wrists slit , he asked me to come meet his councillor , he cried and he begged for forgiveness . I had lost a partner to suicide in 2007 , he asked me how I would explain to

our kids that I had killed him and what would people think of me if both my partners died by suicide !

I began to slip into chaos and confusion again , I felt so bad for him , I didn't want to hurt him , I was panicking , I was scared of what he might do ,he was everywhere !

He booked tickets for shows for the kids and would buy me a ticket, he was making plans and getting upset if I wouldn't go. I was at breaking point and so eventually his persistence paid off and I went , we started spending some time together and I immediately regretted answering his calls , I was falling back into bad habits but I knew things would never get better with him so after a short time I told him that I didn't want to try again .

He ignored me and continued to book tickets , this time for Santa , I didn't go , I went to my Christmas party instead , he didn't take that too well and when I returned home he was waiting in my garden for me .

He mounted the bonnet of the taxi that was carrying me and punched the windscreen so hard it smashed, he pulled the driver from the car and assaulted him , I tried to calm things down but he punched me so hard that I hit the ground and lost consciousness , my friend tried to help me but he assaulted her too , he continued to assault us both as we lay helpless on the ground , he fractured my skull , my eye sockets , broke my nose and my cheek bone , he continued to kick me in the face while I lay unconscious on the ground .

He was brutal , throughout the assault I begged him to stop , I told him he was going to kill me , but he wouldn't stop , I eventually managed to get help from my neighbours and only for them I believe he would have killed me.

After the assault I was taken to hospital where I was advised that I required a reconstructive surgery on my face, he was arrested and held , I had to discharge myself in order to attend his bail hearing , I got a taxi with a broken cheek bone and multiple facial fractures and a fractured skull out to blanchardstown district courts .

I walked past the crowd of people, mostly young men consulting their solicitors, they stared one or two cracked jokes about me not making the dinner or what I may have done to deserve it, I was

traumatised going in and so embarrassed, I sat and waited, they took him out and sat him in the dock, he was calling me, JESS LOOK AT ME .JESS IM SO SORRY. JESS I LOVE YOU, WILL YOU LOOK AT ME JESS

I looked at the floor , I couldn't even look at him , no one intervened to ask him to stop , I had no official court support but my uncle was with me & he urged me to ignore him and tried his best to comfort me.

We returned to my home to get some items for my hospital admission. It dawned on me that the assault may have been captured on my cctv ,part of it was , I called the guards to tell them I had it , they advised me to make a copy and drop it into the station . But it was evidence, my uncle advised me not to touch the hard drive in case I deleted it, I rang them back and told them I wasn't comfortable touching it and that I was afraid it as going to lapse, they told me that I'd have to bring it in because they didn't have a car available, I asked to speak to the Sargent. It wasn't my job to gather evidence and I had a surgery to attend, I was furious, they eventually came and took it. This is the kind of response I've come to expect from the Gardaí. They weren't always helpful.

I later returned to hospital and had my surgery the following day, it was Christmas Eve so once I came through I discharged myself to be with my children.

I would be put through three bail hearings before he was released to coolmine lodge for RESIDENTIAL treatment. His barrister said he had an addiction, I was gutted, he was manipulating the courts for a lesser sentence, I tried to oppose his bail but I was told that he'd be resident in coolmine so I wouldn't have to worry.

You can image how petrified I was when he drove past myself and my children the following week in our local supermarket car park, his barrister failed to mention that he could leave his residential programme overnight and at weekends, and I would like to highlight this with the GC as this should be considered at any bail application and I would ask that this information be circulated within AGS.

There is no onus on Coolmine to notify the Gardaí if a client is being released so there is no opportunity to monitor the accused and therefore leaves the injured party exposed with no safety plan, no bail conditions, no curfew or bail address, this is a very dangerous loop hole that's being abused and I don't think it's fair on the injured party that this be allowed to continue!

My experience with the Gardaí was that they didn't always respond to my calls in a time that was acceptable considering the threat I was under. They didn't always record incidents in the pulse. There were no door to door enquiries done, they didn't check the area for CCTV, a number of my neighbours have CCTV, they didn't ask for it though. They didn't check his phone records to see if there had been a threat issued to me on the night of the assault, I believe there would have been evidence in our phones, but he stole my handbag and so I never got to see what he sent me, he had sent a number of males Facebook messages threatening them for commenting on my photographs, this wasn't followed up.

If the evidence had been stronger the DPP would have possibly have been able to push for a charge of aggravated assault or attempted murder, the evidence is key and it's not being chased and it's simply not good enough that because this is a domestic incident there is no desire to gather evidence, if I hadn't had the CCTV it would have been my word against his and he would have walked.

I was in court recently at a family matter and was accompanied for my own safety by a detective from the GNDVU. She tells me that in possibly, Commissioner Harris's second day in the job he visited the pilot project out in Ballymun.

I was invited to Ballymun Garda station earlier this year by Garda Anita Brannigan, to meet with members of the Garda Protective Services Unit. To share my own experience with them and I was so impressed with the work being done there. They don't take any chances, they have a policy of arresting first time every time an order is breached. They have a follow up service so that victims receive support, they operate a zero tolerance approach!

I know there are plans to expand these units and I would ask you Minister to prioritise the funding of these units so that members of AGS can be properly trained to deal with DV and other serious crimes, sexually violent crimes, human trafficking, child abuse, we need to fund these units if we want the Garda response to be adequate. Every citizen in Ireland should have access to these services within their district. I believe if I'd had access to this unit my outcome would have been so different I'd have had an adequate response and the support that I needed by a team of professionals who understand the dynamics of DV and the risk markers wouldn't have been ignored.

In all the incidents of Gardaí, fire brigade and ambulances arriving at my home, being assaulted in at work, the endless violations of the barring order I was never referred for help, after my assault there was no referrals for counselling or support, in fact in all the years of abuse the only government agency to have any interest in me was the DSP, they asked me to apply for maintenance, this would be deducted from my payment and I knew he wouldn't give me a penny. This happens to so many women who are forced to apply, they have to take their abuser to court, risking a counter strike by means of an access application or an assault as punishment. When the order is made the DSP deduct the amount from her payment and more often than not the money is never paid by the abuser, pushing her into further financial distress,

It has to be said minister that the efforts of the state to hold parents accountable for the financial security of their children don't go far enough, my ex drove a porche and wore a rolex but arrived to court crying poverty and no one asked him to furnish his finances, he still doesn't contribute to the raring of his children.

If he didn't pay his toll fine on the M50 he'd be penalised yet he can walk away from his financial responsibility with ZERO consequence, leaving me trying to provide for his children. We have to put our children's welfare first and for lone parents that's what we do, absent parents must be held accountable by the government and we must do more to help support lone parents.

I feel like I'm now in a financial trap , I work for the HSE I do my best to provide , it's difficult, it's really tough trying to meet everyone's needs . I'm restricted financially but he isn't, I would love to go back to college but the system doesn't support that.

I am urging you to review the government's position on parents who don't make a contribution and to hold them accountable, link in with your colleagues in revenue and the family courts and come up with a better plan, the tax payer has carried redundant parents for far too long.

I hope that with the tireless efforts of organisations like WA, Our government representatives and AGS we can be more proactive in how we deal with these issues and that we can protect the vulnerable and hold those who are responsible to account.