

Law Institute Victoria



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Letters to the editor



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Unsolicited

How about briefing women barristers

Despite it being 50 years since Dame Roma Mitchell was appointed Australia's first female silk, only 9.3 per cent of currently practising senior counsel in Australia are women. In 2012, 17 women were appointed senior counsel across the country, taking the total number of practising female silks to 81.

2012 was undoubtedly a breakthrough year in New South Wales, with women comprising 12 out of 26 appointments. This is compared with two out of 24 in 2011 and four out of 20 in 2010. In Victoria, three out of 20 appointments were women, compared with two out of 15 in 2011 and 3 out of 15 in 2010. However, only five of the 71 applications for silk in Victoria were received from women, suggesting more women need to be encouraged and assisted to apply. South Australia and Queensland each appointed one woman as senior counsel. Sadly no women succeeded in Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT.

How to tackle this inequity? Why not start with solicitors. By briefing women barristers with substantial and quality work, solicitors are providing women with opportunities to gain the advocacy experiences vital to progression to silk.

Kate Ashmor, President, Australian Women Lawyers

For providing the letter of the month Kate Ashmor has won a \$75 book voucher from the LIV bookshop, redeemable for the next 12 months.

Call for security in regional courts

I feel that it would be remiss of me if I did not correct a statement by Isaac Szmerning in his letter in the November LIJ "Securing VCAT" that "all courts in Victoria had full security screening at the front entrance". While it may be the case in the metropolitan area, I am not aware of such facility being available at any regional or country court.

The Shepparton court deals with over 100 cases on a busy day, being made up of criminal, family law, family violence applications, Children's Court (criminal and family) with often VCAT and other tribunals operating. The parties to these often volatile and emotional matters with their friends/support and practitioners are crammed into a small foyer or (weather permitting) forced to wait on the footpath and compete with the noise of heavy traffic including the 60 semi-trailers per hour that pass the court.

There is no security screening at the front door. Instead the only security is a lone police officer who does not have a metal detection wand and even if they did would not have the time to use it. The officer must keep the peace in the court precinct while at the same time moving prisoners between the court and the police station as well as guarding them during their appearances. When things go bad the only additional help comes either from police prosecutors or informants who may be present, otherwise a call is made for a patrol unit to attend.

There has been the rare occasion (average once per year) when a security "flying squad" has come to town for a day and set up security, including screening at the front entrance to the court. This has resulted in knives and other weapons being detected and the offenders charged.

Those of us working in regional and rural courts would welcome more security but we would also like other things such as interview rooms, doors that could be secured, lights and seats that weren't broken, roofs that didn't leak, air conditioning that worked and this is only the tip of our wish list.

Greg Prosser, Prosser Legal

Letters to the editor: We welcome letters to the editor of no more than 400 words.

Email: letters@liv.asn.au **Fax:** 9607 9451 **Mail:** LIJ managing editor Mick Paskos, GPO Box 263, Melbourne 3001; or DX 350 Melbourne. We reserve the right to edit letters and to republish them in their original or edited form on the internet or in other media. Letters must include a phone number and address for authentication.