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## **UNLESS INDICATED OTHERWISE, ALL LEGISLATION REFERRED TO IS VICTORIAN.**

## **2.1 Establishment, Role, Strategic Priorities & Purpose**

The Children's Court of Victoria ['the Court'] was **established** by s.8(1) of the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* (No.56/1989) ['CYPA'] and is continued in operation by s.504(1) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (No.96/2005) [‘CYFA’].

The Court’s **vision** is: "Consistent access for all Victorians to a dedicated, specialist Children’s Court where cases involving children and young people are heard in safe and culturally appropriate environments."

Its **role** is described as follows: “The Children’s Court expertly and fairly applies the law in cases involving children and young people. We work closely with youth justice, legal services, child protection and other community-based services to provide a multi-disciplinary court response to address the best interests of children in need of protection. We promote the accountability and rehabilitation of young offenders and, in doing so, improve community safety.”

In a document entitled “Statement of Priorities 2022-2025”, the Court’s **strategic priorities** are summarised as follows:

1. **Implement Self Determination Plan**
* Ensure the delivery of all initiatives in the Children’s Court Self Determination Plan that sits within the CSV Self Determination Plan – Yaanadhan Manamith Yirramboi: Striving for a Better Tomorrow.
* This Plan sits across all the Court’s Strategic Priorities, ensuring that Koori self-determination underpins all aspects of the Court’s planning and operations.
1. **Improve the Court User Experience**
* Review and adapt service models based on sound evidence to meet the changing needs of Victorian families and young people.
* Undertake an evaluation of online hearings to guide future operating models.
* Explore and identify Family Violence best practices and improve Family Violence responses.
* Refresh the Children’s Koori Court Model to ensure it continues to be tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal young people and look for opportunities for expansion to more locations across the state.
* Support the implementation of the Disability Advice and Response Team (DART), a new support service which will assist in screening for disability and referral to services to address the young person’s disability needs.
* Establish the Children’s Court Online Bail and Remand Court. [This initiative commenced on 03/09/2022 and is described in section 2.5.3 below.]
1. **Increase the number of specialist Children’s Courts**
* Use existing and new assets to deliver high-quality Children’s Court services.
* Develop, design and deliver dedicated Children’s Courts at Bendigo and Wyndham.
* Deliver a dedicated specialist Children’s Court at Dandenong to strengthen access to justice services in Melbourne’s South-east.
* Redevelop the Moorabbin Children’s Court to improve access to Children’s Court services.
* Identify priority locations and plan for new dedicated specialist Children’s Courts.
1. **Engage with the Community**
* Explore ways to increase and improve the way the court engages with court users.
* Undertake regular court user surveys and targeted evaluations to understand and respond to court user needs.
* Make information easily available and tailored to the communication needs of court users.
* Promote better understanding of the unique role of the Children’s Court to improve public confidence in the justice system.
1. **Develop and support our people**
* Design and implement a workforce plan that ensures we have the roles and structures to achieve our vision and fulfil our unique role.
* Develop safety and wellbeing strategies that define the foundations for maintaining a healthy workplace.
* Ensure access to high quality and contemporary education and training for staff to maintain and further enhance specialist capabilities.
1. **Enhance participation and efficiency through technology**
* Design and implement a modern end-to-end Case Management System. [This is in the process of construction: see section 1.6.3 of the Research Materials.]
* Improve wayfinding and information provided to court users.
* Update Children’s Court courtrooms with the attest technology to enable greater accessibility and flexibility in the way matters are heard.

The Court’s **purpose** is: "To provide an efficient, modern and responsive specialist court to hear and determine cases involving children and young persons in a timely, just and equitable manner which is easily understood by court users and the public generally."

It is important to emphasize what the Court’s purpose is not. As an institution of judicial decision-making, the Court has no power to become involved with a child until either-

* an officer of the Child Protection Service of the Victorian Government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing;
* an officer of Victoria Police; or
* some other authorised person-

decides to invoke its jurisdiction by commencing a case in the Court. The Court has no authority to play a general watch-dog role like an ombudsman or a commissioner for children. Nor does it provide any overall or continuous supervision of the Child Protection Service or any other agency involved with a child once the particular case before it has been completed. Nor, unlike the Coroner’s Court, does it have an investigative arm except insofar as the assistance provided by the Children’s Court Clinic in the context of a particular case or its power to issue subpoenas could be so classified. The Court is, by definition, a reactive part of the system, although in its written decisions it sometimes makes general comments about perceived failures within the system.

It is also important to understand that the Court is completely independent of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police just as it is of all of the other parties – parents, children, extended family members or others – who appear in cases before it. In his report entitled “Protective Services for Children in Victoria” Justice Fogarty made this crystal clear as long ago as 1993 yet the Court still regularly hears comments along the lines that the Court and the Department are engaged in a partnership to protect the children of Victoria. The Children’s Court is not in a partnership with anybody. It is not a “stakeholder” in anything nor are the police nor the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing “stakeholders” in it. They have no greater “ownership” of the Court than any other litigant. The Court’s independent nature and its purpose were described by Justice Fogarty at pp.142-143 of his report as follows:

“Whilst different models could have been provided for the court or tribunal carrying out the responsibilities now imposed on the Children’s Court, the fact is that throughout its history in Victoria these duties have been carried out through a court, but coupled with provisions that it is to proceed without undue formality and that it is not to be inhibited by the normal Court rules of procedure and evidence. That is also the approach generally accepted in each of the other States.

Much of the criticism [of the Court], especially from the Department, proceeds in my view from a failure to understand this. A significant reason for the existence of the Children’s Court is that it stands independent of the Department, the children and the parents and represents the community in the determination of these extremely difficult and delicate issues which are likely to have a profound, perhaps permanent, effect on the lives of the young children involved. Consequently, it is necessary for the Court to be independent and to be seen to be independent, especially from the Department which is a party in every proceeding before it. It must have the confidence of the parents who come before it and the confidence of the community that it will act in an independent way in accordance with the legislation.

At times I was left with the impression in discussion with some officers of the Department, that they would really like to regard the Court as a natural extension of the Department and that they are uncomfortable with its independence. Whilst that view was not articulated in a direct way, it is important that even at a subconscious level that attitude be recognized and rejected. I felt at times, both at a high level within the Department and from speaking with some workers, that there was a view that because a notification of abuse had been investigated by the Department and because it had reached a conclusion as to what order should be made, there was something obstructive about a process by which those opinions and views were independently assessed and at times rejected.

In reality, the orders sought by the Department are accepted by the Children’s Court in a surprisingly high percentage of cases. The figures demonstrate that this happened in excess of 80% of cases and even amongst the remaining 20% a number are withdrawn or not proceeded with by the Department as distinct from being rejected by the Court.

In my view the Children’s Court must maintain its position of independence and integrity and if anything that position should be reinforced rather than diminished.”

See also *Re C Children* [Children’s Court of Victoria-Power M, unreported, 18/07/2013] at pp.98-100.

## **2.2 Judicial & Administrative officers of the Court**

Under s.504(2) of the CYFA, the Court consists of:

* a President;
* the magistrates;
* the judicial registrars; and
* the registrars-

of the Court.

The President is a judge of the County Court who is appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Attorney-General made after consultation with the Chief Judge: s.508(2). The President holds office for a term not exceeding 5 years and is eligible for reappointment: s.508(3)(a). The President may exercise any power conferred on a magistrate by or under the CYFA or any other Act: s.508(8).

The first President of the Court was Judge Jennifer Coate. She was appointed in June 2000. She had previously been Senior Magistrate of the Court since December 1995. Her predecessor, Mr Greg Levine, is currently a Reserve Magistrate at the Court. The second President, appointed in late April 2006, was Judge Paul Grant who was previously a Deputy Chief Magistrate in the Magistrates’ Court. The third President, appointed on 01 May 2013, was Judge Peter Couzens who was previously a Regional Coordinating Magistrate. The fourth President, appointed on 12 May 2015, was Judge Amanda Chambers who was previously a Magistrate. The current President, as and from 01 January 2021, is Judge Jack Vandersteen who was previously a Regional Coordinating Magistrate.

The President, after consulting the Chief Magistrate, may assign any person who is appointed a magistrate or a reserve magistrate to be a magistrate for the Court, whether exclusively or in addition to any other duties: s.507(1). In making such assignment, the President must have regard to the experience of the person assigned in matters relating to child welfare: s.507(2). The President, after consulting the Chief Magistrate, may at any time revoke such assignment: s.507(3). See also [Part 2.6](#_2.6_A_specialist) below.

Under ss.509(1) & 509(3), the Governor in Council may appoint a magistrate nominated by the President to be Acting President for a term not exceeding 3 months during any period when:

* there is a vacancy in the office of President; or
* the President is absent on leave or temporarily unable to perform the duties of the office.

Provisions relating to judicial registrars, including appointment, duties, powers, remuneration and terms & conditions, are set out in Part 7.6A of the CYFA and in the *Children, Youth and Families (Children’s Court Judicial Registrars) Rules 2021* [S.R.No.22/2021], as amended from 23/07/2021 by S.R.No.90/2021. The powers of judicial registrars in the Children’s Court include the power:

* r.2.03: to deal with the 6 listed matters whether or not contested;
* r.2.04: to deal with the 11 listed Criminal Division matters whether or not contested;
* r.2.05: to deal with the 4 listed Criminal Division matters – including diversion – if uncontested;
* r.2.06: to deal with the 5 listed Family Division matters – including matters under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* and the *Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010* – whether or not contested;
* r.2.07: in addition to r.2.06(1) to deal with any other uncontested Family Division applications;
* r.2.09: to perform the duties and exercise the powers of registrars.

In addition, r.2.06(2) provides that the Court constituted by a judicial registrar may preside at the following hearing types in the Family Division: a judicial resolution conference, a readiness hearing, a directions hearing, a mention or special mention and a return from a conciliation conference.

The President may assign duties to a magistrate for the Court [s.510(1)] and to a judicial registrar [s.542A(1)]. Such magistrate/judicial registrar must carry out the duties so assigned [s.510(2)/ s.542A(2)]. Nothing in s.13 of the Magistrates’ Court Act 1989 gives the Chief Magistrate any power to assign duties to a magistrate for the Children’s Court in respect of his or her office as a magistrate for the Court [s.510(3)]. It is important to note that although the President has power to assign duties to a magistrate and to a judicial registrar, the principles of judicial independence do not permit the President to direct a magistrate or a judicial registrar as to how to carry out his or her judicial function.

The following officers of the Court are authorised by s.535(1) of the CYFA:

* a principal registrar;
* registrars; and
* deputy registrars.

The duties, powers and functions of these officers are set out in the CYFA and the regulations [s.535(3)]. Pursuant to s.539, these include:

* power to issue any process out of the Court;
* power to administer an oath or affirmation;
* with the consent of the parties to a proceeding in the Family Division, power to extend an interim accommodation of a kind referred to in ss.263(1)(a) & 263(1)(b) of the CYFA;
* power to abridge or extend the bail of a person granted bail in relation to a criminal proceeding;
* power to endorse a warrant to arrest in accordance with s.62 of the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*;
* powers to do various things under intervention order legislation.

See also s.21 of the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*.

The current Principal Registrar of the Court is Ms Leanne de Morton who has held that position since the retirement of her predecessor, Mr Godfrey Cabral, in December 2002. Mr Cabral had previously been Principal Registrar since September 1998.

Section 545(1) of the CYFA continues the Children's Court Liaison Office, established by s.36(1) of the CYPA. The functions of the Children’s Court Liaison Office are set out in s.545(3):

(a) to provide information and advice about the Court to children, families and the community;

(b) to co-ordinate the provision to the Court of any reports that are required;

(c) to collect and keep general information and statistics on the operation of the Court;

(d) to provide general advice and assistance to the Court; and

(e) to undertake any research that is required to enable it to carry out its functions.

## **2.3 Organisational Structure of the Children's Court at Melbourne**

|  |
| --- |
| **OFFICE HOLDERS – 09 SEPTEMBER 2022** |
| President | Judge Jack Vandersteen |
| Chief Executive Officer | Mr Simon McDonald |
| Chief Operating Officer | Mr Rob Challis |
| Principal Registrar | Ms Leanne de Morton |
| Strategic Advisor to the President | Ms Louise James |
| General Manager, Court Programs & Support Services | Mr Peter Lamb |
| Director, Operations & Service Delivery Transformation | Ms Kylie Pieters |
| Senior Legal Officer | Dr Lisa Lee |
| Senior Registrar | Ms Emma Taylor |
| State Co-ordinator | Mr Glenn Barnes |
| Special Advisor to the President | Mr Peter Power |

## **2.4 Divisions of the Court**

Under s.504(3) of the CYFA the Children’s Court in effect has three Divisions-

(a) the Family Division;

(b) the Criminal Division; and

(c) the Koori Court (Criminal Division).

For reasons which are unclear to the writer s.504(3)(d) defines a fourth Division, the Neighbourhood Justice Division. In reality, the Neighbourhood Justice Centre [NJC] is simply a venue of:

* the Criminal Division of the Court; and
* that part of the Family Division relating to intervention orders.

Section 3(4) of the CYFA provides that unless the context otherwise requires, a reference in the CYFA to the Criminal Division includes a reference to the Koori Court (Criminal Division).

The Court must not sit as more than one Division at the same time in the same room: s.504(5).

Under s.504(7), the Court, in any Division, is constituted by the President or a magistrate except in the case of any proceeding for which provision is made by any Act for the Court to be constituted by a registrar. Examples of the latter include applications for extension of bail and applications for extension of certain sorts of interim accommodation orders. However, under s.504(8) the Court may be constituted by a judicial registrar in any proceeding for which provision is made by rules of court for-

(a) the court to be so constituted; and

(b) the delegation to judicial registrars of powers of the court to hear and determine such proceeding.

## **2.5 Venues of the Court**

### **2.5.1 Sections 505 & 505A of the CYFA**

Section 505 of the CYFA formerly contained a fairly rigid stipulation, in part requiring the Children’s Court to be held at places at which the Magistrates’ Court is to be held and on such days and at such times as the President, after consulting the Chief Magistrate, appoints by notice published in the Government Gazette. Curiously, although not expressly excluded, the headquarters of each of the Courts [Melbourne Children’s Court and Melbourne Magistrates’ Court] never complied with s.505(1)(a), having always been in completely separate buildings. Section 505(3) prohibited the Children’s Court from being held in the same building as that in which the Magistrates’ Court was at the time sitting unless the Governor in Council, by Order published in the Government Gazette, otherwise directed with respect to any particular building. Subject to that, s.505(4) permitted the Children’s Court to sit and act at any time and place.

The situation was further complicated by the absence of a legislative link between s.505 and the definition of ‘proper venue’ in s.3(1). Speaking generally, the ‘proper venue’ is the venue of the Court that is nearest to the place of residence of the child or the place where the subject-matter of the case arose.

Although the Children’s Court understands the importance of keeping its proceedings as far as possible away from courts in which adult proceedings are being conducted, the interests of justice occasionally require them to be held at the same time in the same building. Accordingly, for this reason and because of an ongoing need for online hearings from time to time, s.505 has been substantially amended to provide simply: “The Court may sit and act at any time and place.”

New s.505A now provides the following link with the definition of ‘proper venue’ in s.3(1):

“(1) Without limiting s.505, the Court may order that a hearing be held at an appropriate place that is not the proper venue for the hearing if the Court considers that-

1. for any reason it is appropriate that the hearing not be held at the proper venue; and
2. it is in the interests of justice that the hearing not be held at the proper venue.

(2) In determining an appropriate place to hold a hearing for the purposes of subsection (1), the Court must first have regard to-

1. places closest to the proper venue for the hearing; and
2. the views of the parties to the proceeding.”

For a discussion of the meaning of “interests of justice” in the context of an unopposed but unsuccessful application for a judge-alone trial see the dicta of Jane Dixon J in *DPP v JH* [2022] VSC 237 at [15]-[19], including her Honour’s reference to [2020] VCC 726, cited with approval by Hollingworth J in *DPP v Tiba* [2020] VSC 600, and also cited with approval by the Court of Appeal in *Hooper v Oxymed Australia Pty Ltd* [2021] VSCA 68 [37].

Factors to be considered in relation to an application to change the venue of a Supreme Court murder trial are set in *R v Allan (Change of Venue)* [2018] VSC 571 at [5]-[7]. At [5] her Honour referred with approval to the legal principles set out in *R v Iaria and Panozzo* [2004] VSC 96 at [10] where Nettle J quoted with approval the formulation of Pincus JA in *R v Yanner* [1988] 2 Qd R 208:

“… the proper rule to be applied is that each case in which an application is made for a change of venue falls to be considered on its own merits and not with any preconceptions, save that a trial should ordinarily proceed in the district in which the offence charged is alleged to have been committed, ‘removal being warranted where sufficient cause is shown’.”

See also *R v Vjestica* [2008] VSCA 47 per Maxwell P.

### **2.5.2 Current Victorian Children’s Court venues**

At present the Children’s Court sits as required at every Magistrates' Court (other than the Melbourne Magistrates' Court) and at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre [NJC] in Collingwood. The locations are listed below. At most suburban locations, the Children's Court has a separate entrance from the Magistrates' Court. At Melbourne, Broadmeadows & Moorabbin JC and at all country and regional locations, the Court sits in both Divisions. At all suburban locations other than Broadmeadows and Moorabbin JC the Court sits only in the Criminal Division and in that part of the Family Division relating to intervention orders.

Except for final contests all Family Division cases originating from DFFH’s Southern region offices are generally heard at Moorabbin JC. Except for final contests listed for 3 days or more all Family Division cases originating from DFFH’s Preston office are generally heard at Broadmeadows. All other Family Division cases arising in the extended metropolitan area are generally heard at Melbourne Children's Court.

VICTORIAN CHILDREN’S COURT VENUES



Ararat

Bairnsdale

Ballarat

Benalla

Bendigo

Broadmeadows

Castlemaine

Cobram

Colac

Corryong

Dandenong

Echuca

Frankston

Geelong

Hamilton

Heidelberg

Hopetoun

Horsham

Kerang

Korumburra

Kyneton

Latrobe Valley

Mansfield

Maryborough

Melbourne

Mildura

Moorabbin JC

Myrtleford

Nhill

NJC (Collingwood)

Omeo

Orbost

Ouyen

Portland

Ringwood

Robinvale

Sale

Seymour

Shepparton

St Arnaud

Stawell

Sunshine

Swan Hill

Wangaratta

Warrnambool

Werribee

Wodonga

Wonthaggi

In addition, Melbourne Children's Court and many of the suburban, country and regional venues are equipped with video-conferencing & remote witness facilities. These have 2 main functions:

* to allow a judicial officer and/or one or more parties to be in a different location from another party; thus, for instance, a magistrate in Melbourne can preside over a case in which some or all of the parties are in Bendigo;
* to allow a witness who is in a location remote from the courtroom to give evidence and be cross-examined without coming into the courtroom; there are 2 main situations in which the Court is likely to permit this to be used:

(i) where a witness is interstate or overseas or in another town or city;

(ii) where a witness is in the same town or city but the court orders that, for reasons of convenience, safety or protection of the witness, the witness should not be in the same room as a party.

See e.g. ss.42E & 42F of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958.* In *R v Cox & Ors (Ruling No.6)* {also known as *R v Cox, Sadler, Ferguson & Ferguson*} [2005] VSC 364 Kaye J summarized the principles on the application of s.42E which he considered were to be elucidated from the cases of *R v Kim* (1998) 104 A Crim R 233, *R v Weiss* [2002] VSC 15 & *R v Strawhorn* [2004] VSC 415. In *R v Goldman* [2004] VSC 165 Redlich J traced the genesis of the legislation and analysed a large number of relevant cases – Victorian, Australian & foreign – before concluding at [32] that: "The accused's right to confrontation and the forensic advantages that may flow therefrom needs to be balanced against the need to protect the witness against the risk of harm."

Melbourne Children's Court is the headquarters of the Children's Court of Victoria. The President and most of the registry staff are located there, as are 16 magistrates and 5 reserve magistrates who are currently assigned to the Children's Court. In addition RCM Dotchin is located at Moorabbin JC and is assisted by one magistrate. RCM Macpherson is located at Broadmeadows and is assisted by one magistrate. Three judicial registrars – appointed in May 2021 – are located at Melbourne Children’s Court.

At suburban, country & regional locations, a magistrate assigned to that court generally hears cases in the Children's Court in addition to his or her other duties in the Magistrates' Court. However, in country & regional locations, final contested Family Division hearings listed for 3 days or more are generally heard by the Melbourne Children’s Court. At Shepparton Children’s Court a Melbourne Children’s Court magistrate sits on Thursday/Friday to hear Children’s Court cases.

In addition, contested suburban criminal cases of more than 1 day's duration are generally heard by the Melbourne Children's Court, albeit at the discretion of the coordinators of both courts.

### **2.5.3 Children’s Court Weekend Online Remand Court [WORC]**

Commencing on 03/09/2022 a new Children’s Court Weekend Online Remand Court [WORC] has been established in the Criminal Division of the Court to hear-

* bail and remand applications;
* pleas by remanded children in appropriate cases; and
* other appropriate Criminal Division applications-

online from across the State. WORC will sit between the hours of 3pm and 9pm on weekends and public holidays (excluding Christmas Day and New Year’s Day). Any part-heard WORC cases will be adjourned at the discretion of the presiding judicial officer. Any other uncompleted WORC cases will generally be adjourned to the proper venue of the Children’s Court on an appropriate date.

After hours Interim Accommodation Order hearings in the Family Division of the Court will continue to be heard by Bail Justices.

Out of Court bail and remand applications will also continue to be heard by Bail Justices. A child who is remanded by a Bail Justice is to be remanded to the next sitting of the Children’s Court, whether that be a WORC sitting or a weekday sitting.

Youth Justice, the Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service (CAHABPS), Victoria Legal Aid’s Youth Crime Program and Victoria Police Specialist Children’s Court Prosecution Group have all worked closely with the Children’s Court to set up WORC, using the expertise and cooperation developed over the last two years during the justice system’s crisis response and digital transformation.

The establishment of WORC has increased access to justice for young people in metropolitan and regional Victoria by ensuring:

* access to specialist Children’s Court magistrates;
* immediate referrals to services and supports;
* access to legal representation at the most critical time;
* access to technology to appear in court directly from police stations or Youth Justice Centres; and
* significantly reduced pressure on local Courts.

## **2.6 A specialist court**

Prior to 2000 the Children’s Court had been in some respects a sort of ‘add-on’ to the Magistrates’ Court. In the Second Reading Speech in support of the *Children and Young Persons (Appointment of President) Bill 2000* the then Attorney-General Mr Hulls made it clear that one of the purposes of the Bill was to create an autonomous specialist court [Hansard, 04/05/2000, p.1322]:

“The…Bill elevates the status and authority of the long-neglected Children’s Court and by doing so advances the government’s commitment to promoting the position of young people in the Victorian community.

The Bill creates the office of President of the Children’s Court and establishes the Children’s Court as a new court which is separate from the Magistrates’ Court.

The creation of the office of President of the Children’s Court:

* reflects the importance, increasing specialisation and authority of the Children’s Court; and
* will allow the Children’s Court to develop its specialist responsibilities autonomously. The President will be able to promote the adoption of a consistent philosophy and set standards for the consistent treatment of young people in courts across the state. This advances the government policy of growing the whole of the state of Victoria and providing increased services to rural and regional Victoria.

The establishment of the Children’s Court as a freestanding, separately recognised court underlines its increased importance and specialisation. This change clearly demonstrates the government’s recognition of the important role played by the Children’s Court in our judicial system in providing a specialised court catering for children and young people in both the criminal and family jurisdictions.”

Section 507(2) of the CYFA requires the President, in assigning a magistrate or a reserve magistrate to be a magistrate for the Court, to have regard to his or her experience in matters relating to child welfare.

In order to enhance their experience in this specialist area, judicial officers assigned to the Court attend regular seminars on various matters relating to child welfare, especially on psychological and psychiatric issues and on aspects of child abuse. Many of these are closed seminars arranged by the Children's Court Clinic.

In *T v Secretary of Department of Human Services* [1999] VSC 42 Beach J dismissed an appeal by a mother against interim accommodation orders placing her 2 children in the care of a suitable person. At the conclusion of his judgment, Beach J said at [21]:

"The Children's Court is a specialist court presided over by Magistrates experienced in matters affecting young children and with ready access to experts in the field of child care. It is beyond doubt that Magistrates at the Court become very skilled in dealing with children and assessing the veracity of evidence given by them in courts and of the complaints they make particularly complaints of sexual abuse. Th[e Supreme] Court should be reluctant to interfere with orders of the Court made in such matters, particularly interim orders which are still subject to further review by the Children's Court itself and should do so only where it is abundantly clear that some significant error has been made."

In *P v RM & Ors* [2004] VSC 14 Gillard J, after referring to the above dicta, said at [28]: "I would not raise the hurdle as high as that…Speaking for myself I take the view that weight should be accorded to decisions made by Magistrates experienced in this area." In *DOHS v SM* [2006] VSC 129 at [14] Hansen J expressed a similar view:

“[T]he decision of an experienced Magistrate in a specialist court is to be afforded respect and weight in consequence that it is such a decision, but doing so, in the end the decision must nevertheless be regarded in the context of all the relevant facts and circumstances of the case.”

In *DOHS v Sanding* [2011] VSC 42 at [28] Bell J referred with approval to the first two sentences of the above dicta of Beach J in *T’s case* and to dicta of Gillard J in *R v RM & Ors* at [27] and of Habersberger J in *CJ v DOHS* [2004] VSC 317 at [21] and said:

“This Court recognizes the specialist nature of the jurisdiction of the Children’s Court and the expertise which it has developed in the exercise of that jurisdiction… This will be an important consideration in the present case, for the court will be cautious before interfering with decisions made by the Children’s Court concerning the procedures to be followed in the exercise of its specialist jurisdiction.”

In *DHHS v Brown* [2018] VSC 775 Beach J said at [62]:

“The Children’s Court is a busy specialist jurisdiction that deals day in day out with cases involving the wellbeing of children. It is frequently called upon to resolve matters of great complexity where there may be significant competing considerations that must be taken into account in the resolution of its proceedings. Accordingly, in an appeal of the present kind, the views of the magistrate who has conducted a lengthy and detailed proceeding must be accorded considerable weight. There is no occasion for this Court to substitute its view for the view of the magistrate in a case where reasonable minds might legitimately disagree.”

In *Cardell (a pseudonym) v DHHS* [2019] VSC 781 Maxwell P said at [40]-[41]:

“The written submission for the appellant contended that, if the appeal from the Children’s Court orders failed, then this Court should proceed to make its own order with respect to the care and protection of Oliver. I expressed the provisional view in the course of argument that, were that to be the outcome of the appeal, it was extremely unlikely that I would be persuaded to exercise the Court’s inherent [*parens patriae*] power. I drew attention to authorities relied on by the Secretary (who is the defendant to the originating motion), the effect of which is that where a child’s welfare is being dealt with by a specialist court, under a legislative scheme explicitly directed at child welfare, the Supreme Court would be very slow to step in and exercise its own jurisdiction: *Re Anna, Bruno, Courtney and Deepak* [2001] NSWSC 79, [20]; *RC v Director-General, Department of Family and Community Services* [2014] NSWCA 38, [65]. I remain of that view.”

In *TSH v DFFH* [2022] VSC 390, having referred to the judgment of Beach J in *T v Secretary of Department of Human Services* [1999] VSC 42, the judgment of his son in *DHHS v Brown* [2018] VSC 775 at [62] and the judgments in *P v RM* [2004] VSC 14 at [28] and *DOHS v SM* [2006] VSC 129 at [13]‑[14], Tsalamandris J said at [62]:

“I consider that the Magistrate sitting in the specialist Children’s Court decided the appropriate weight to be given to each of the principles required of her under s 10(3) of the Act. There is nothing to persuade me that the Magistrate erred in law in respect of her decision.”

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## **2.7 The Court is generally open to the public**

Generally, courts are open to the public. Anyone has a right to go into any court when it is sitting, unless for special reason in a particular case the presiding judge/magistrate has ordered a closed court hearing. The reason for this was stated in eloquent terms by Lord Shaw of Dunfermline in *Scott v Scott* [1913] AC 417. Quoting Bentham, his Lordship said at 477-8:

“’Publicity is the very soul of justice. It is the keenest spur to exertion and the surest of all guards against improbity. It keeps the judge himself while trying under trial’. ‘The security of securities is publicity’ but amongst historians the grave and enlightened verdict of Hallam, in which he ranks the publicity of judicial proceedings even higher than the rights of Parliament as a guarantee of public security, is not likely to be forgotten: ‘Civil liberty in this Kingdom has two direct guarantees; the open administration of justice according to known laws truly interpreted, and fair constructions of evidence; and the right of Parliament, without let or interruption, to inquire into, and obtain redress of, grievances. Of these, the first is by far the most indispensable; nor can the subjects of any State be reckoned to enjoy a real freedom, where this condition is not found both in its judicial exercise and in their constant exercise.”

The principles espoused in *Scott v Scott* were recognized by the High Court in *Russell v Russell* (1976) 134 CLR 495, a case which concerned, among other things, the constitutional validity of sections of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) which at that time required Family Courts to be closed and prohibited publication of their proceedings. At p.520 Gibbs CJ said:

"It is the ordinary rule of the Supreme Court, as of the other courts of the nation, that their proceedings shall be conducted 'publicly and in open view' (*Scott v Scott* [1913] AC 417 at 441). This rule has the virtue that the proceedings of every court are fully exposed to public and professional scrutiny and criticism without which abuses may flourish undetected. Further, the public administration of justice tends to maintain confidence in the integrity and independence of the courts. The fact that courts of law are held openly and not in secret is an essential aspect of their character. It distinguishes their activities from those of administrative officials, for 'publicity is the authentic hall-mark of judicial as distinct from administrative procedure' (*McPherson v McPherson* [1936] AC 177 at 200). To require a court invariably to sit in closed court is to alter the nature of the court. Of course there are established exceptions to the general rule that judicial proceedings shall be conducted in public; and the category of exceptions is not closed to the Parliament. The need to maintain secrecy or confidentiality in the interests of privacy or delicacy may in some cases be thought to render it desirable for a matter, or part of it, to be heard in closed court."

Similar statements of principle are to be found in numerous other cases, including *Dickason v Dickason* (1913) 17 CLR 50, *David Syme & Co Ltd v General Motors Holden’s Ltd* [1984] 2 N.S.W.L.R. 294 per Street CJ at 299, Hutley AP at 307 & Samuels JA at 310, *Raybos Australia Pty Ltd v Jones* [1985] 2 NSWLR 47 per Kirby P at 50-53, *John Fairfax & Sons Ltd v Police Tribunal of New South Wales* (1986) 5 N.S.W.L.R. 465 per McHugh JA at 476; *Jarvie v Magistrates' Court of Victoria* [1995] 1 VR 84 per Brooking J; *Herald & Weekly Times Ltd v Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria* [1999] 1 VR 267 at 278-292 per Hedigan J; *The Queen v G* [2007] VSC 503 [Edited Version] esp at [14]-[16] per Whelan J; *Russo v Russo* [2010] VSC 98 at [9]-[16] & [25] per Croft J.

When the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) commenced in 1975, it provided that cases would be heard in closed court and also prevented publication of any details of the cases. This was to preserve the privacy of the people involved, including the children, and to prevent reporting in the media of sensationalised stories about peoples' private lives. Following wide-spread criticism, the provision for closed Family Court hearings was repealed in 1983 and the prohibition on publication was substantially modified, so that now it only prohibits publication of anything which identifies people involved in the case.

### **2.7.1 Section 523 of the CYFA**

Prior to the commencement of the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* ['CYPA'], proceedings in the Children's Court were closed to the public. Without leave of the Court, the only persons who could attend were the child, a parent or guardian of the child, the child's legal representative and representatives of various service providers. That was changed in 1991 by s.19 of the CYPA and the change has been continued by s.523 of the CYFA. However, this section is subject to s.527A which makes evidence of anything said or done in a judicial resolution conference inadmissible unless the Court otherwise orders, having regard to the interests of justice and fairness.

Underpinned by the same sorts of reasons as led to the opening of Family Courts, ss.523(1) & 523(2) of the CYFA require all proceedings in the Children's Court to be conducted in open court unless the Court, on the application of a party or of any other person who has a direct interest in the proceeding or without any such application, orders that-

1. the whole or any part of a proceeding be heard in closed court; or
2. only persons or classes of persons specified by it may be present during the whole or any part of a proceeding.

See also s.125(1) of the *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989*. Victoria is comparatively unusual in this respect. In many other jurisdictions, including China and England, children's court proceedings are closed to the public.

However, s.523 of the CYFA has in effect been modified by COVID and post-COVID amendments to the *Open Courts Act 2013* which provide-

* permanently that handing down and delivering judgments by electronic communication; and
* temporarily until 26/10/2023 that a failure to hold a hearing in a court room open to the public-

do not contravene rules of law relating to open justice provided that certain stipulations are met.

So far as the presence in Court of an accused is concerned, the Court of Appeal in *Mareangareu v The Queen* [2019] VSCA 101 said at [59]: “It is a fundamental principle that, unless there is some disentitling conduct or waiver, all aspects of a trial for an indictable offence must be conducted in the presence of the accused. See *Lawrence v The King* [1933] AC 699, 708; *R v Abrahams* (1895) 21 VLR 343, 347‑8; *R v Vernell* [1953] VLR 590, 596; *R v Jones* (1998) 72 SASR 281, 294–5.” However, the accused may be present in Court by audio visual link or audio link in circumstances falling within Division 3 of Part IIA of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*.

### **2.7.2 Sections 28 to 30 of the *Open Courts Act 2013***

The *Open Courts Act 2013* (‘the OCA’) does not, in its express terms, apply to the Children’s Court: see definition of “court or tribunal” in s.3. Section 523 of the CYFA remains the primary source of power. However, it is the opinion of the writer that s.528(1) of the CYFA makes those provisions of the OCA which invest jurisdiction on the Magistrates’ Court applicable to the Children’s Court to the extent that they are not inconsistent. The Director of Criminal Law Policy of the Department of Justice and Community Safety has advised the Principal Registrar of the Children’s Court that-

“The Children's Court was considered as the [OCA] was drafted…[I]n so far as the Children's Court can exercise the powers of the Magistrates' Court under s.528(1), it retains the power to make any order that the Magistrates Court can make. There was certainly no intention for the OCA to be interpreted as narrowing s.528(1) of the CYFA.”

In order “to strengthen and promote the principle of open justice”, the OCA originally provided in s.28 a presumption in favour of hearing a proceeding in open court. The *Open Courts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2019* replaced the presumption in favour of open courts with an obligation to consider the primacy of the open justice principle, free communication and disclosure of information, and to not make a closed court order unless necessary to override that principle. This obligation effectively applies to any closure of the court, whether made under the *Open Courts Act*, other legislation, or at common law. Section 29 of the OCA provides that the common law powers to make closed court orders remain unaffected by the OCA.

Hence, in deciding whether or not a Children’s Court hearing should be closed in whole or part under s.523 of the CYFA, the provisions of s.30(2) of the OCA [replacing s.126(1) of the *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989*] are relevant by virtue of s.528(1) of the CYFA. Insofar as it is relevant, s.30(2) of the OCA provides:

“A court…may make a closed court order if satisfied as to one or more of the following grounds-

1. the order is necessary to prevent a real and substantial risk of prejudice to the proper administration of justice that cannot be prevented by other reasonably available means;
2. the order is necessary to prevent prejudice to the interests of the Commonwealth or a State or Territory in relation to national or international security;
3. the order is necessary to protect the safety of any person;
4. the order is necessary to avoid causing undue distress or embarrassment to a complainant or witness in any criminal proceeding involving a sexual offence or a family violence offence;
5. the order is necessary to avoid causing undue distress or embarrassment to a child who is a witness in any criminal proceeding…”

However, in the writer’s view these five circumstances do not comprise a complete list of pre‑conditions to the making of a Children’s Court closed court order under s.523 of the CYFA.

It is important to note that closed court orders-

* are not suppression orders; they do not directly suppress material or fall within the definition of ‘suppression order’ in s.3 of the OCA and hence are not subject to the general provisions applicable to suppression orders in Part 2 of the OCA;
* are one of the most severe encroachments on the open justice principle, involving as they do a prohibition on the attendance of the public or certain members thereof against the general rule that justice must be administered in open court;
* are not a bar to the publication of reports on the proceedings and do not justify withholding publication of the court’s judgment and orders; courts and tribunals should always seek to publish an appropriately formulated statement of reasons, conveying an adequate account of the litigation and the reasons underlying its orders: *David Syme & Co Ltd v General Motors-Holden’s Ltd*[1984] 2 NSWLR 294; redaction of reports of proceedings may allow the judgment and orders to be published without causing prejudice where a court has been closed.

Closed court orders are often seen as an order of last resort. Section 30(2)(a) of the OCA provides that a closed court order must be necessary to prevent a real and substantial risk of prejudice to the administration of justice “that cannot be prevented by other reasonably available means”, such as “making a proceeding suppression order”. The implication is that proceeding suppression orders impinge less significantly on the open justice principle.

Courts have confirmed the desirability of addressing the relevant concern without issuing a closed court order. For example:

* In *ABC v D1* [2007] VSC 480 J Forrest J noted at [36]:

“The nature of the order which is sought to be made is germane to the ultimate disposition of a suppression application. The closing of the Court for the whole of a proceeding is a serious matter indeed; on the other hand, suppressing the names of certain witnesses but permitting the evidence at the hearing to be reported will require different considerations.”

* In *XY v Board of Examiners*[2003] VSC 196 Cummins J said at [11] that “there are a number of steps short of closure of the Court or prohibition of the whole of the proceedings which can meet a number of [the applicant’s] concerns, including use of pseudonyms, prohibition of publication of names and other matters of sensitivity”.
* In *Ami Australia Holdings Pty Ltd v Fairfax Media Publications Pty Ltd* [2009] NSWSC 1290, Brereton J hesitantly closed the court after anxious consideration of other options at [6]-[7]:

“I have considered whether, short of conducting proceedings in closed court, some other mechanism — such as a non-publication order could be put in place — which might permit the court to remain open while at the same time preventing or prohibiting publication of the imputations. But it seems to me that, given that if the court were open it would be open to all, and the court would not be in a position to be able to identify and control who might enter and who might have notice of any non-publication order, that would not be a satisfactory solution. It also seems to me that requiring counsel, witnesses and the court to use veiled speech during the hearing would not be in the interests of justice. In effect, such a course would still seek to conceal from the public what was at the heart of the proceedings, while going through the pretence of conducting them in open court, while at the same time imposing additional difficulties on the conduct of the proceedings.

As grave a step as it is — and it is one that I embark upon with considerable hesitation — it seems to me that the fundamental point is that the relief sought in the proceedings would be rendered futile if the proceedings were not conducted in a closed court…”

Nevertheless, a closed court order may be preferable in proceedings where an open court would create an unacceptable risk that sensitive or confidential information would be disclosed. In *R v Lodhi* (2006) 199 FLR 270, Whealy J thought at [31] that non-publication orders could be made “as such problems emerge”, but “that would be to run the real risk that the damage would have been done” which would be “plainly so if the inadvertence were to occur in open court.”

### **2.7.3 Pseudonym orders**

Section 7(d) of the *Open Courts Act 2013* provides that that Act does not limit or otherwise affect the making of an order or decision by a court or tribunal that—

1. conceals the identity of a person by restricting the way the person is referred to in open court;
2. restricts the way an event or thing may be referred to in open court;
3. prohibits or restricts access to a court or tribunal file.

As Dixon J noted in *AS v Minister for Immigration and Border Protection* [2014] VSC 486 at [3], such orders – known as pseudonym orders – differ from other restrictions on open justice, such as suppression orders and closed court orders. In that case the litigation guardian for a 6 year old asylum seeker living in detention in Christmas Island and proposing to issue proceedings on behalf of AS for damages for psychological harm had sought a suppression order. Dixon J did not make a proceeding suppression order but made a pseudonym order that the plaintiff only be referred to by the pseudonym AS and that all documents filed in the proceeding only refer to the plaintiff as AS. At [7] his Honour referred to and applied the following principles applicable in making pseudonym orders as distilled by J Forrest J in *ABC v D1 and Others; Ex Parte The Herald Sun & Weekly Times Limited* [2007] VSC 480 at [64]-[71]:

“First, that the principal rule is that judicial hearings should take place in open court: publicly and in open view, with no restriction on reporting. This is a fundamental precept underpinning the administration of justice.

Second, that in certain circumstances the administration of justice requires a qualification of the general rule. There will be circumstances where modifications of the general rule are necessarily made to ensure that the administration of justice is not frustrated. These exceptions are many and varied and cannot be prescriptively identified.

Third, that the test to be applied by the court in making the pseudonym order is, to use the words of the statute, where it is necessary to do so in order not to prejudice the administration of justice.

Fourth, that a court, in determining whether to make a pseudonym order, is entitled to take into account the individual considerations affecting the person seeking the order and balance those against the principal rule of open justice in determining whether the administration of justice warrants the making of the order. Relevant to these individual considerations is whether there is a real risk of the party or witness suffering psychological harm as a result of publication of his or her name or the names of other parties. Also relevant is the real risk of a party not proceeding with an action in the event that he or she or another person is identified.

Fifth, that in certain circumstances, particularly those involving sexual assaults, it may be appropriate not only to suppress the name of the plaintiff but also to suppress the name of the defendant or defendants.

Sixth, that in determining whether to make such an order, a court is entitled to take into account the fact that there will still be a reporting of the proceeding and that the hearing itself will be conducted in open court, subject to the restrictions imposed by the pseudonym order.

Seventh, in determining whether it is necessary to make such an order, usually the proofs must be cogent and will not be satisfied by mere belief on the part of a party that the order is necessary. However, in certain cases a court can, in a practical sense, act on its own experience and draw appropriate inferences.”

As Dixon J also noted at [9], the fourth point identified by Forest J, that “genuinely held fears of psychological harm upon disclosure of identity will be a relevant factor for the court’s consideration is illustrated by *TTT & JJJ v The State of Victoria* [2013] VSC 162 at [18] per Cavanough J.

In making a pseudonym order in *XYZ v State of Victoria & Anor* [2016] VSC 339, T Forrest J approved and applied the principles espoused by J Forrest J in *ABC v D1 and Others; Ex Parte The Herald Sun & Weekly Times Limited* [2007] VSC 480 and by Cavanough J in *TTT & JJJ v The State of Victoria* [2013] VSC 162 and added at [17] (emphasis mine):

“The *Open Courts Act* recognises that a pseudonym order differs from other restrictions on open justice, such as suppression orders and closed court orders. When a proceeding suppression order is made under s.17 of the *Open Courts Act*, it is necessary to comply with Part 3 of that Act. The order I propose to make will not constitute a proceeding suppression order. There will be no effect on the public nature of the proceedings and the ability of the media to fully report on proceedings will only be restricted on the issue of the identity of the proposed plaintiff and other individuals involved: see the comments in *X v Sydney Children’s Hospitals Speciality Network* [2011] NSWSC 1272 [15] and *Witness v Marsden & Anor* (2000) 49 NSWLR 429.

599 at [24]-[32]. order will not directly restrain conduct by publication, although a potential liability in contempt may arise on breach of the order [*AAA v BBB* (unreported, Supreme Court of Victoria, Ashley J, 26/08/1994, 6-7; *R v Savvas, Stevens & Peisley* (1989) 43 A Crim R 331; *Attorney-General for NSW v Mayas Pty Ltd* (1988) 14 NSWLR 342,355], but **no need arises for media proprietors to be heard in respect of either the making or the revocation of the order.** My order will be subject to any further order.”

See also *ABC-1 & ABC-2 v Ring & Ring* [2014] VSC 5; *Giurina v Giurina* [2018] VSC 599 at [24]-[32]; *XBA (ex parte)* [2019] VSC 49 at [4]-[17]; *GHJ v Secretary to the Department of Justice and Community Safety* [2019] VSC 89; *Jane Doe v XYZ* [2019] VSC 176 at [9]; *IJW v Swinburne University of Technology* [2021] VSC 846 at [31]-[42]; *Karam v The Queen (Ruling No.2)* [2022] VSC 168.

### **2.7.4 Media applications for copies of court documents in Criminal Division cases**

A protocol regarding media access to certain documents in cases in the Criminal Division of the Children’s Court has been developed by the court. Journalists making applications for access to materials are generally required to file a completed “Application for Access to Material” form which also contains a 6 point undertaking to be given by the journalist in the event that materials are released. A copy of this Application form can be downloaded from the Children’s Court website by tabbing “Forms” 🡺 “General Forms” 🡺 “Application for Access to Material”. Whether or not all or any part of the requested material is released is entirely at the discretion of the presiding judicial officer in each case.

### **2.7.5 Media applications for copies of audio or audiovisual recordings of police interviews**

There are specific prohibitions in the *Crimes Act 1958* in relation to the possession and playing of audio recordings or audiovisual recordings of police interviews and associated recordings made under ss.464B(5H), 464G or 464H. Section 464JA(2) makes it an offence punishable by level 8 imprisonment for a person other than the suspect, his/her legal representative and an authorized person acting in the course of his or her duties knowingly to possess such a recording. Section 464JA(3) makes it an offence, also punishable by level 8 imprisonment, to play such a recording except in certain circumstances. One such circumstance is if “the recording is played by an authorised person acting in the course of his or her duties”. Eighteen categories of persons are defined in s.464JA(1) as “authorized persons”. The relevant category for media applications is s.464JA(1)(i): “...a person acting under the direction of a court”. This must be read in conjunction with s.464JB(2): “A court may give directions, with or without conditions, as to the supply, copying, editing, erasure, playing or publishing of [such a] recording.”

When Parliament enacted the *Open Courts Act 2013* it chose not to include records of interview in that Act but left the question of their release totally in the hands of the Court under s.464JB(2) of the *Crimes Act 1958*: see *R v Hemming (Ruling 1)* [2015] VSC 351 [8] & [18] per King J. In *DPP v Angela Maree Williams (Ruling No.1)* [2015] VSC 107 – a decision approved and applied by both King J in *R v Hemming* and Lasry J in *R v Reed-Robertson* [2016] VSC 236 [20]-[22] – Hollingworth J provided at [11] the following non-exhaustive list of factors which may be relevant to the exercise of the court’s discretion pursuant to s.464JB:

“(a) the privacy of the interviewee, interviewers, and others mentioned in the interview;

(b) whether the interviewee consents to the release;

(c) the attitude of other people affected by the interview;

(d) whether any person (such as victims or children) would be adversely affected by release;

(e) whether the record of interview discloses graphic details of offending;

(f) whether any criminal investigations or trials are ongoing;

(g) whether release may undermine the integrity of the criminal justice process;

(h) the level of contemporaneous public interest in the case;

(i) whether release will enhance the fair and accurate reporting of the case;

(j) the principle of open justice (where the record of interview has been played in open court); and

(k) the nature of the proposed publication.”

Applying this test ultimately all three applications for release of audiovisual recordings were refused.

In the Children’s Court the restriction on publication of proceedings set out in s.534 of the CYFA – discussed below – creates an additional hurdle for a media applicant seeking copies of audio or audiovisual recordings of police interviews of accused children.

### **2.7.6 Recording of proceedings in the Children’s Court**

All Court proceedings in the Children’s Court are digitally recorded by the Court in accordance with s.19A *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989* read in conjunction with s.528(2)(a) CYFA. Section 19A provides: “The principal registrar must ensure that all proceedings in the Court are recorded in accordance with the Rules.” However, in light of the general confidentiality provisions in s.226 CYFA, Family Division conciliation conferences are not formally recorded.

Digital recordings – provided in PC CD-ROM format – are generally available for 12 months from the date of the hearing. To apply for a copy of a digital recording of a Court proceeding, the applicant must-

* complete a “Request for Copy of Audio Recording” form which can be downloaded from the Children’s Court website <https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/court-forms/general-forms>; and
* pay a fee of $55 per day unless the fee has been waived by the Court.

Applications must be made directly to the venue of the Children’s Court where the proceeding was heard. If the application is approved by the presiding magistrate or the President, the applicant must not copy, distribute or publish, or cause the copying, distribution or publication of the recording in any way without the express approval of the Court. In this regard, the application form contains a **WARNING** relating to the publication of identifying particulars prohibited by s.534 of the CYFA which is discussed in section 2.8.1 below.

There are specific offences created by ss.4A, 4B & 4C of the *Court Security Act 1980* [CSA] which relate to the **unauthorised** recording of Court proceedings and to the **unauthorised** publishing or transmitting of recordings of Court proceedings. The sections each provide a maximum penalty of 20 penalty units. In s.2(1) of the CSA, “Court” includes the Children’s Court and “proceeding” includes a Children’s Court proceeding. A specific form is available on the Children’s Court website which must be completed by any member of the public making an application to record proceedings in the Criminal Division of the Children’s Court.

## **2.8 Restriction on publication of proceedings**

### **2.8.1 Statutory prohibition on publication of identifying particulars-s.534 of the CYFA**

The *quid pro quo* for the general opening of the Children’s Court is to be found in s.534(1) of the CYFA [previously in s.26 of the CYPA] under which it is an offence punishable by fine or imprisonment for a person to publish or cause to be published-

(a) except with the permission of the President, a report of any proceeding in the Court or of a proceeding in any other court arising out of a proceeding in the Court that contains any particulars likely to lead to the identification of-

(i) the particular venue of the Children's Court, other than the Koori Court (Criminal Division) or the Neighbourhood Justice Division, in which the proceeding was heard; or

 (ii) a child or other party to the proceeding; or

(iii) a witness in the proceeding; or

(b) except with the permission of the President, a picture as being or including a picture of a child or other party to, or a witness in, a proceeding referred to in (a) above; or

(c) except with the permission of the President (or – per s.534(3) – of the Secretary granted in special circumstances in relation to a child who is the subject of a family reunification order, care by Secretary order or long-term care order), any matter that contains any particulars likely to lead to the identification of a child as being the subject of an order made by the Court.

Section 534A exempts from the restrictions in s.534(1) identifying material, including a picture, of a victim or alleged victim aged 18 or older so long as the circumstances detailed in s.534A(2) do not apply.

Section 534B – inserted in 2019 – exempts from the restrictions in s.534(1) identifying material published by a judge of the County Court or the Supreme Court when sentencing an adult offender in the circumstances detailed in s.534B(2).

Section 534(1A) provides that on application to the Court, a magistrate may exercise the powers of the President under ss.534(1)(a), (1)(b) or (1)(c) and grant permission for the requisite publication if the magistrate is satisfied that-

1. the circumstances giving rise to the request for permission to publish are an emergency; and
2. publication is reasonably necessary for the safety of-
3. the child, other party or witness referred to in s.534(1); or
4. any other person in the community.

Section 534(4) of the CYFA lists the following particulars – not intended to be exhaustive – which are deemed to be particulars likely to lead to the identification of a person:

1. the name of the person;
2. the names of-
3. any relative of the person;
4. any other person having the care of the person;
5. in addition to subparagraphs (i) & (ii), in the case of an Aboriginal person, a member of the Aboriginal community of the person;
6. the name or address of any place of residence of the person, or the locality in which the residence is situated;
7. the name or address of any place of education, training or employment attended by the person, or the locality in which the place is situated.

In *Herald & Weekly Times Pty Ltd v AB* [2008] VChC 3 at [14]-[19] Judge Grant outlined the legislative background and rationale for s.534 and its predecessor provisions as follows:

“[14] Prior to the commencement of the CYPA matters heard in the Children’s Court of Victoria were heard in closed court. This is still the case in some jurisdictions throughout the world.

[15] The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Justice (also known as the Beijing Rules) of November 1985 state-

‘8.1 The juvenile’s right to privacy shall be respected at all stages in order to avoid harm being caused to him or her by undue publicity or by the process of labelling.

8.2 In principle, no information that may lead to the identification of a juvenile offender shall be published.’

[16] The official commentary to the Rules recognises how young people are particularly susceptible to stigmatization. There is a reference to criminological research into labelling processes. This research has provided evidence of the detrimental effects resulting from the permanent identification of young people as criminal or delinquent.

[17] The *Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review Report* of 1984 (often referred to as the Carney Report) recommended that proceedings in the Children’s Court should be open to both the public and the media. The ‘trade off’ for opening the court was to recommend a bar on reporting or disseminating any identifying information of children and families. At p.409 of the report there is the following analysis – ‘The mischief which it is unanimously agreed must be avoided at all costs is the dissemination of information which would, or which could, identify and embarrass individual children and families appearing before the court.’

[18] The recommendations in the Carney Report were influential in the development of the CYPA. The changes to law introduced by that Act opened the Children’s Court to the public for the first time in its history. There were, however, two important riders on the open justice principle. In s.19 the court was provided with a wide unfettered power to close the court in appropriate circumstances. Section 26 contained a prohibition as to the publication of identifying information of the children and parties and witnesses involved in the court’s proceedings without the permission of the head of the Children’s Court.

[19] In the Criminal Division of the court the limit on identification of the child/young person subject to proceedings was in line with established principle. It was designed to protect a young person appearing in the Criminal Division from the indignity of being labelled a criminal and the stigma that attaches to that description. In the Second Reading Speech for the CYPA the then Minister stated ‘The rights of children and young people who come before the court are clearly established in the proposed legislation. The Bill provides that proceedings must be comprehensible to children and their families, respect cultural identity and minimize stigma.’ Section 534 of the CYFA significantly reproduces the old s.26. One sub-section not found in the old Act is s.534(5)...It allows publication of accounts of proceedings of the court where those accounts have been approved by the President...Section 534(5) was included in the legislation at the request of the court and I am satisfied that its intended purpose was limited to the court’s use of its own website for the publishing of de-identified decisions.”

It is rare for the President to give permission for identifying material to be published pursuant to ss.534(1)(a), 534(1)(b) or 534(1)(c) of the CYFA. In the past seven years, the only cases in which such permission has been given have involved:

* abandoned children where details were permitted to be published in an attempt to locate a parent;
* children who were missing or had absconded in an attempt to locate them;
* children believed to be in need of protection but whose whereabouts are currently unknown; and
* a case in which a TV channel was permitted to identify a child - with consent of child and family – in a program highlighting the success of the child's rehabilitation.

In *ABC and DOHS & others* [2014] VChC 1 an application was made to Judge Couzens to publish reports of a proceeding in the Children’s Court, including pictures of parties in de-identified form. Counsel agreed that ‘likely’ in the context of particulars ‘likely to lead to the identification of’’ should be taken to mean ‘a real possibility that cannot be sensibly ignored’ as opposed to being ‘more likely than not’: see in *Re H and Others (Minors) (Sexual Abuse: Standard of Proof)* [1996] AC 563 at 583. His Honour adopted dicta of the Court of Appeal in *Howe v Harvey* (2008) 20 VR 638 at 653 that-

“We are inclined to think that s.26 [of the CYPA] would be breached if the particulars which are published are sufficient to enable those who know a child (for example his or her school friends or neighbours) to identify him or her as the child who has been involved in court proceedings, even though a general reader would not do so.”

Judge Couzens held [at pp.12-13] that a pixilated/distorted/partial picture of a child or other party or witness in a proceedings in the Children’s Court was subject to the prohibition in s.534(1)(b) whether or not publication of the picture is likely to lead to the identification of the child, party or witness. His Honour said: “In my view, if the legislature had intended to limit the prohibition to only pictures that were likely to lead to the identification of a child, other party or witness, it would have been expected to include those words as it did with (1)(a) and (c).” However, his Honour ultimately granted the ABC’s application and permitted the publication of reports – which included a partial picture of the child and a distorted picture of the child’s father – for the following reasons [at p.16]:

“Ultimately, the question of whether or not to grant the ABC’s application is a balancing exercise between the paramount interests of the children who are the subject of the report and the public’s right to know about what is reported to have happened to the children whilst in the care of DHS.

Where, as in this case, I am satisfied that the risk of the children being identified is at best minimal, the public’s interest in knowing what is said to have happened to these highly vulnerable children in the care of the State weighs the balance firmly in favour of publication.”

In *HWT v DM & Ors* [2016] VChC 3 an application had been made to Judge Chambers for permission to publish pixilated pictures and video recordings of children who have been involved in proceedings in the Criminal Division of the Children’s Court and in respect of whom the Court has sentenced, or has deferred sentencing, under the provisions of the CYFA. The application was made in the context of the involvement of the HWT in a “Youth Summit” to be convened by the Chief Commissioner of Police on 21/07/2016. The application was opposed by the three young persons whose pixilated photographs were proposed to be published for the following factual reasons (set out at [12]):

“[T]hey fear being identified by family members, friends and associates who are not aware of their role in this offending, or by other members of their community, including other young people held in detention, if their images (even where pixilated) accompany the feature article....[They] are ashamed of their offending behaviour, and submit that the shame and embarrassment to them and to their families will be exacerbated by the publication of the images. They fear becoming the ‘face’ of the problems leading to the Youth summit being convened.”

In refusing the HWT application her Honour held-

[15] “...I intend to adopt the approach of Judge Couzens to my consideration of this application. In doing so, it is instructive that Parliament has not utilised the language it purposely adopted for s.534(1)(a) and (1)(c). Section 534(1)(b) does not limit the prohibition of images of a child, a party or a witness involved in proceedings in the Children’s Court to those likely to lead to their identification. It is a broader prohibition, prohibiting the publication of such images without the permission of the President, even where the images may not lead to the identification of those whose image is represented in picture.

[16] Clearly, in exercising my discretion under s.534(1) of the Act, I must have regard to a number of competing interests.

[17] [I]n considering any proceedings under the Act, it is necessary to have regard to, and to the extent possible, give effect to the purposes of the Act contained in s.3, which includes making provision in relation to children who have been charged with, or been found guilty of offences. Parliament has sought to achieve this objective by creating a distinct sentencing regime for children with discrete sentencing considerations set out at s.362 of the Act, in marked contrast to the sentencing considerations applicable to adults under the *Sentencing Act 1991*. These considerations include those aimed at achieving the important objective of rehabilitating the child while minimising the stigma to the child resulting from a Court determination.

[18] The distinctive nature of the Children’s Court criminal jurisdiction was recently considered by the Victorian Court of Appeal in the decision of *Webster (a Pseudonym) v The Queen* [2016] VSCA 66... at [7]-[9]...

[19] The desirability of avoiding stigma to a child is also emphasised in the procedural guidelines set out at s.522 of the Act which requires the Court, as far as practicable, to minimise the stigma to the child and his or her family in any proceeding, including an application under Part 7.5. The Court is also required to have regard to the expressed wishes of the child.

[20] Against this, the case of the applicant is framed in the context of the public interest in promoting an understanding of and facilitating public debate surrounding the nature and extent of criminal offending by a small cohort of young offenders.

[21] In my view, this application must be considered in the context of the harm sought to be ameliorated by s534(1) of the Act. As stated in *Howe v Harvey (2008) 20 VR 638 at 651* the provision is intended to protect against ‘the stigmatisation and interference with the privacy of the child and his or her family caused by identifying them as participants in court proceedings’. In so stating, the Court echoed the fundamental rights of a child as outlined in Article 40 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child to ‘have his or her rights to privacy fully respected at all stages of the proceedings’.

[22] Here, even where the facial images of the offenders are pixilated or distorted, there are other identifying features of the offenders that are relevant to my consideration. These include, but are not limited to, distinctive clothing or clothing generally worn by the offender or their physical characteristics including their height, build, gait and particular mannerisms that may otherwise lead to identification. This is relevant to my consideration of the potential stigmatising impact of publication of the images on the respondents.

[23] The HWT is able to report...on the nature and extent of the offending conduct leading to the charges before the Court, provided it does so in a manner that is not likely to lead to their identification. A question arises whether the public interest in understanding the nature and extent of the offending is furthered by the incorporation of the images and CCTV footage. Moreover, that the public interest in being so informed overrides the competing interest in avoiding stigma to the child, protecting the child’s privacy and facilitating the important objective of furthering the child’s rehabilitation to achieve the twin objectives of reducing the risk of further offending and promoting community safety.

[24] In respect of this application, having the benefit of considering the draft feature article and the detail contained in that article regarding the offences, I do not consider that the public interest or public understanding is significantly advanced by the incorporation of even heavily redacted images of the offending. Certainly, not to the extent that it overrides the legislative objective of protecting child offenders from stigmatisation and promoting the rehabilitation of those who are the subject of proceedings in the ‘distinctive’ criminal jurisdiction of this Court.”

In *Victoria Police v. AY & NA (pseudonyms)* [Melbourne Children’s Court, 29/05/2019] the respondents were 2 of 4 youths who were believed to have committed two aggravated home invasions, an attempted carjacking, a carjacking and associated offences. Applications were made to Judge Chambers by Victoria Police to publish identifying details of the respondents whose whereabouts were unknown. Holding that the circumstances giving rise to the applications are an emergency and that publication is reasonably necessary for the safety of other persons and members of the community, her Honour granted the applications for permission to publish particulars likely to lead to the identification of the child in the form of the draft media release produced by Victoria Police together with the accompanying photographs. Pursuant to s.534(1A) of the CYFA her Honour made self-executing orders in these terms but held that upon the location and arrest of the child the permission to publish will no longer apply and the permission granted by the order will be taken to be revoked.

In 2009 the then President, Judge Grant, had taken advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions and agreed with his advice that the publication of photographs of children or witnesses involved in Children’s Court proceedings, “whether pixilated or otherwise altered to prevent the identity of the [person] being revealed, would breach [s.534(1)(b) of the CYPA]”. By letter dated 28/05/2009 his Honour requested the Strategic Communications Advisor to the Supreme Court of Victoria to publish a warning to all media outlets about this interpretation of s.534(1)(b).

There have been several prosecutions of persons or bodies corporate alleged to have breached s.534 of the CYFA or s.26 of the CYPA. One such prosecution was *Peter Harvey v Channel 7 Melbourne Pty Ltd, The Herald and Weekly Times Pty Ltd, Nationwide News Pty Ltd & Others*, a decision of Magistrate Lisa Hannan [now Judge Hannan of the County Court] on 15/05/2006. This prosecution followed the publication of identifying particulars of a 14 year old boy who had made an application at Melbourne Children’s Court alleging irreconcilable differences with his mother. Her Honour held at pp.9-11 that an offence against s.26 is a strict liability offence. At pp.15-18 she was unable to be satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that those of the defendants who were reporters or news readers had the necessary degree of control over what was ultimately broadcast or telecast to bring them within the scope of “publish” or “cause to be published” in s.26. She ultimately dismissed the charges against 12 of the 17 defendants. She found the charges proved against the remaining 5 defendants and imposed significant fines. Appeals and cross-appeals against Her Honour’s decision were dismissed by the Supreme Court: *Howe & Ors v Harvey; DPP v Quist & Ors* [2007] VSC 130. Ensuing appeals and cross-appeals were dismissed by the Court of Appeal: *Howe & Ors v Harvey & DPP & Ors* (2008) 20 VR 638; [2008] VSCA 181.

In *Porch v State of Victoria* [2023] VSC 61 John Dixon J drew a distinction between ‘publication of a report of a proceeding’ under s.534 CYFA, s.166 *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)* or s.121 *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)* and ‘inspection and copying of a Court file’. The substantive proceeding in this case was a common law claim for negligence against the State of Victoria brought by the plaintiff Ms Porch under Part 4, Division 8 of the *Victoria Police Act 2013* (Vic) in respect of the conduct of police officers. A material allegation, central to the plaintiff’s claims, concerned the conduct of a police officer, DS who was married to the plaintiff and they had three children. DS was also in a relationship with Ms B which, in part, overlapped with his marriage to the plaintiff.

The Age Company Ltd – a non-party to the proceeding – had applied for permission to inspect and copy the pleadings in these proceedings pursuant to r 28.05 of the *Supreme Court (General Civil Procedure Rules) 2015 (Vic)*. The Prothonotary initially refused the Age’s request on the basis that provision of the file would be a breach of its obligations under s 534 of the CYFA. The plaintiff’s solicitors informed the Prothonotary of her consent to the Age inspecting the file. To the Age’s renewed requests, the Prothonotary maintained this refusal on the basis that provision of the file would be a breach of its obligations under s 166(2)(b) of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) and s 121 of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth). The pleadings also named Ms B who may be a witness to and/or a victim of family violence.  Ms B, who was also represented on the application by the plaintiff’s solicitor – also consented to the Age’s request. John Dixon J ordered that The Age, by its authorised representatives, be permitted to inspect and copy the pleadings in these proceedings. In particular at [18]-[21] his Honour said:

[18] “It is necessary to look more closely at the provisions of the Family Violence Protection Act, as the pleadings make reference to proceedings and orders made under that Act. Section 166(2) cannot reasonably be construed by the concept of ‘publish or cause to be published’ as applying to the exercise of the prima facie right to inspect a court file.

[19] As the Age submitted, there are two reasons why permitting inspection of the court file in this proceeding does not infringe the Family Violence Protection Act. First, the proceeding is not a proceeding under the Act. Secondly, the inspection and copying of a pleading is neither a ‘publication’ nor a ‘report of the proceeding’ or a ‘report about the order’ for the purposes of the Act. The Act defines ‘publish’ by s 4 in these terms: publish means disseminate or provide access to the public or a section of the public by any means, including by—

(a) publication in a book, newspaper, magazine, or other written publication; or

(b) broadcast by radio or television; or

(c) public exhibition; or

(d) broadcast or electronic communication—

and publication must be construed accordingly;

[20] The notion of providing access to a person (the non-party searcher) cannot be conflated with the concept of providing access to the public or a section of the public. What the non-party searcher of the court file does with information gained from the inspection is not governed by the rule. Parliament did not intend to define ‘publish’ in a manner that restricted access defined information from a court file to any person because the text and context of the Act, particularly the notion of providing ‘access to the public’ cannot apply to dissemination of information to individuals as occurs when a court file is searched. The notion of access to the public is different from the notion of access to an individual. Subsequent dissemination of information gained from a court file to the public (which may be publishing) is not a matter governed by the rule or raised for consideration in this application.

[21] Parliament having chosen to use ordinary words of broad import means they should not be given an unduly narrow or technical meaning as would result if the words ‘the public or section of the public’ were read as ‘a person’: see *Cooper Brookes (Wollongong) Pty Ltd v Federal Commissioner of Taxation* (1981) 147 CLR 297, 305, 320- 1; *Mills v Meeking* (1990) 169 CLR 214, 233; *Collector of Customs v Agfa-Gevaert Ltd* (1996) 186 CLR 389, 398.”

### **2.8.2 Suppression orders**

Leaving aside the restriction in s.534 of the CYFA on publication of identifying particulars and/or pictures, the legal principles applying to suppression orders are the same for the Children’s Court as for the Magistrates’ Court.

Suppression orders are the antithesis of the open justice principle. In *R v Robert Scott Pomeroy* [2002] VSC 178, a case involving an order suppressing publication of certain aspects of an adult criminal proceeding in the Supreme Court, Teague J said at [7]:

“The open justice principle has been applied in many cases and in many differing situations. It requires that courts must be open, and that what is said and done in the courts can be published with only such restrictions as are necessary in the interests of justice. The media is vigilant to see that it continues to be applied. But the courts, and particularly superior courts, are also vigilant to see that it continues to be applied, because the operation of the principle is an essential attribute of a court. The leading authority on the scope of, and the reasons for, the principle is *Scott v Scott* [1913] AC 417. The application of the principle has often been endorsed as in *Dickason v Dickason* (1913) CLR 50, and *Russell v Russell* (1976) 134 CLR 495.”

The superior courts had an inherent power at common law to make suppression orders but in the absence of express statutory power inferior courts or tribunals did not: *Herald & Weekly Times Ltd v Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria* [1999] 1 VR 267 at 278-292 per Hedigan J. That common law power has been abrogated by s.5(1) of the *Open Courts Act 2013* (‘OCA’) and s.4 of that Act creates a presumption in favour of disclosure of information. The statutory powers to make suppression orders previously vested in the Supreme Court by ss.18-19 of the Supreme Court Act 1986, in the County Court by s.80 of the County Court Act 1958 and in the Magistrates’ Court by s.126 of the *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989* have been repealed by ss.54, 45 & 51 of the OCA respectively.

In lieu the Supreme Court, the County Court and the Magistrates’ Court now have power under s.17 of the OCA to make a “proceeding suppression order” to prohibit or restrict the disclosure by publication or otherwise of-

(a) a report of the whole or any part of a proceeding;

(b) any information derived from a proceeding.

The grounds for making a “proceeding suppression order” are set out in s.18(1) of the OCA and are identical to those in s.30(2) for the making of a closed court order. So far as is relevant, s.18(1) provides:

“A court…may make a proceeding suppression order if satisfied as to one or more of the following grounds-

1. the order is necessary to prevent a real and substantial risk of prejudice to the proper administration of justice that cannot be prevented by other reasonably available means;
2. the order is necessary to prevent prejudice to the interests of the Commonwealth or a State or Territory in relation to national or international security;
3. the order is necessary to protect the safety of any person;
4. the order is necessary to avoid causing undue distress or embarrassment to a complainant or witness in any criminal proceeding involving a sexual offence or a family violence offence;
5. the order is necessary to avoid causing undue distress or embarrassment to a child who is a witness in any criminal proceeding…”

In *IMO an Application by “The Age” and Ors re: R v Carl Anthony Williams* [2004] VSC 413 at [14] Kellam J, citing dicta of McPherson J in *Ex parte the Queensland Law Society* [1984] Qd R 166 at 170 and of McHugh J in *John Fairfax & Sons Pty Ltd v Police Tribunal of NSW* (1986) 5 NSWLR 465 at 477, reiterated the ‘necessity’ test for the application of s.18 of the *Supreme Court Act 1986*:

“That [suppression] orders should be made in cases only of clear necessity is established beyond any argument by the decision of the Court of Appeal of the Supreme Court of Victoria in *An Application by Chief Commissioner of Police (Vic) for leave to appeal* [2004] VSCA 3 when the Court in a unanimous judgment stated that orders suppressing publication of court proceedings should be made only when ‘clearly necessary’ {at [30]}. I observe that that decision was upheld by the High Court.”

In *WEQ (a pseudonym) v Medical Board of Australia* [2021] VSCA 343 a proceeding suppression order had been made in disciplinary proceedings in VCAT against the applicant medical practitioner. The order – of lifetime duration – suppressed the identity of participants in a Family Court proceeding, family members and the regulator’s witnesses. Holding that-

* the order was overly broad, going well beyond what was necessary in the interests of justice;
* it applied to significantly more information than was necessary to achieve its purpose and was of longer duration that reasonably necessary; and
* it was unnecessary to duplicate the Family Court suppression regime in s.121 *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth)-

the Court of Appeal (Kyrou & McLeish JJA) allowed the appeal in part and varied the order by revoking the confidentiality orders but making an interim proceeding suppression order in narrower terms. At [59]‑[67] the Court detailed the following principles (citations omitted):

[59] “The principle of open justice is a fundamental rule of the common law and an essential part of the functioning of the Australian justice system. Its purpose is to expose proceedings to ‘public and professional scrutiny’ and inform the public how judicial (or administrative) power is exercised, and on what evidential basis. This enhances accountability, and assists in maintaining public confidence in the integrity and independence of courts and tribunals.

[60] An aspect of the principle of open justice is that what occurs in open court (or an open tribunal) may be publicised. Persons present in an open court or tribunal may disseminate to others who were not present fair and accurate reports of the proceedings, including the names of the parties and witnesses and the evidence given. It has been said that proceedings must be ‘exposed in their entirety to the cathartic glare of publicity’, subject only to limited exceptions ‘sparingly allowed’.

[61] In disciplinary or criminal proceedings, this aspect of the principle of open justice assumes particular importance as there is a special public interest in the community knowing the outcome of such proceedings. The publicity of disciplinary proceedings assists in protecting the public, signals to the relevant profession what is and is not acceptable professional conduct, and serves the purposes of specific and general deterrence.

[62] The Actrecognises and reinforces the principle of open justice, in respect of the Tribunal, as well as the courts. It provides for the primacy of the principle and authorises departure from it only in specified circumstances. Relevantly for present purposes, s 4(2) provides that a court or tribunal ‘is only to make a suppression order if satisfied that the specific circumstances of a case make it necessary to override or displace the principle of open justice and the free communication and disclosure of information’.

[63] It is a particular type of suppression order, a proceeding suppression order, that is now in issue. A proceeding suppression order is defined as an order prohibiting or restricting the disclosure of a report of all or part of a proceeding, or any information derived from the proceeding. The Act specifies the circumstances in which it is permissible to depart from the principle by making such an order.

[64] First, the power to make a proceeding suppression order depends on the court or tribunal being satisfied that the order is ‘necessary’ to achieve at least one of a number of enumerated purposes set out in s 18 of the Act. Necessity is a stringent standard, requiring a high degree of satisfaction; it is not enough that it would be reasonable or desirable to make an order for one of the purposes identified in s 18.

[65] Secondly, the requisite standard is to be satisfied on the basis of evidence or ‘sufficient credible information’ showing that the relevant ground is made out: s 14. This is a substantive requirement applicable even when an application is consented to or not opposed. By reference to such information, the court or tribunal must carefully ‘scrutinise the justification for, and the nature and scope of, the proposed order’.

[66] Thirdly, the duration and scope of any proceeding suppression order must not exceed what is necessary to achieve its purpose. Any proceeding suppression order must not exceed the duration ‘reasonably necessary’ to achieve the purpose for which it is made: s 12(4). Similarly, any order must not apply to (and so restrict the disclosure of) any more information than necessary to achieve the relevant purpose: s 13(1)(b). The information to which the order does apply must be specified with sufficient particularity so that the scope of the order is readily apparent from its terms: s 13(1)(c).

[67] Fourthly, the court or tribunal that makes a proceeding suppression order (other than an interim order) must provide reasons setting out the ground(s) relied on, and justifying the duration and scope of the order: s 14A(1).”

Finally, at [93] the Court of Appeal commented on the relationship between a closed court order on the one hand and any pseudonym and/or proceeding suppression order on the other hand:

“Relatedly, the existence and scope of any pseudonym and/or proceeding suppression order may affect whether it remains necessary to maintain a closed tribunal order in respect of the entire proceeding. A closed tribunal order is subject to the strict necessity standard described above, in respect of the same enumerated grounds: see ss.28(2) & 30(2) of the Act. As a result, the requisite standard may no longer be attainable if a proceeding suppression order and/or a pseudonym order has already satisfied the purpose for which a closed tribunal order might otherwise be thought necessary.”

For a partly redacted discussion of ss.17(b) and 18(1)(a) & (c) of the *Open Courts Act 2013* – including whether or not a non-publication order was necessary to prevent prejudice to the administration of justice or was necessary to protect safety of any person – see *AB (a pseudonym) v CD (a pseudonym) & EF (a pseudonym)* [2019] VSCA 28 esp. at [64]-[80] & [85]-[89]. See also *Madafferi v The Queen* [2022] VSCA 189; *Attorney-General v Khan (suppression order)* [2022] VSC 627.

Section 19 of the OCA allows a “court” to make a “proceeding suppression order”-

* on its own motion; or
* on application of a party to the proceeding; or
* on application by any other person considered by the court to have a sufficient interest in the making of the order.

In *DPP v QPX* [2014] VSC 211 Bongiorno JA made a 5 year proceeding suppression order preventing disclosure of the identity of the accused who had pleaded guilty to infanticide and the identities of the three related children. His Honour had expert evidence from a psychiatrist who had examined the accused as well as a senior psychologist which expressed opinions, *inter alia*, about the potential negative impact of disclosure on the psychological health of the accused and the surviving children. At [15] his Honour said:

“The grounds upon which a suppression order relevant to this case might be made are set out in s 18 of the [OCA]. They include the ground set out in s 18(1)(c), that the order is necessary to protect the safety of any person. Accordingly, the order must be *necessary*,not merely ‘convenient, reasonable or sensible’: *Hogan v Australian Crime Commission* (2010) 240 CLR 651, [31]–[33]. Without the order, the safety of a person or persons must be endangered. The protection of a person's safety implies the defending or shielding of that person from injury or danger. That danger might involve danger of physical harm or it might involve danger to a person's psychological health or a combination of both. There is no warrant to qualify the meaning of the word ‘safety’ in s.18(1)(c) by confining it to physical safety. Psychological harm to a person may be as serious or worse than physical harm. In any event psychological harm may well create a serious danger of physical harm, as the evidence in this case suggests.”

In *Re Williams (a pseudonym) (No 2)* [2016] VSC 364, in the course of hearing a bail application by an adult facing serious criminal charges Maxwell ACJ on his own motion concluded that a “proceeding suppression order” should be made under s.19(1)(a) of the OCA in order “to prevent a real and substantial risk of prejudice to the proper administration of justice [which] cannot be prevented by other reasonably available means”: s.18(1)(a). Exercising a right under s.19(2)(e) to appear and be heard on the hearing of the subsequent application by the DPP for a suppression order, counsel for The Herald and Weekly Times Pty Ltd ingenuously advised the Court that his client “only had an interest in opposing the [suppression] application in the event that bail was to be granted”. At [14] & [16] Maxwell ACJ was strongly critical of this one-sided approach to reporting:

“If it is important for the community to know that bail has been granted in a case where there are concerns about interference with witnesses, it must be equally important for the community to know that bail has been refused precisely because of those concerns...

The public interest would be much better served, in my view, if the community was made aware of the full range of bail decisions which are made including, in particular, decisions to refuse bail and decisions to grant bail subject to onerous conditions. Promoting that awareness is a shared responsibility of the Court and the media: *WCB v The Queen* (2010) 29 VR 483, 492 [27]. Properly informed in that way, the community would be entitled to have a high degree of confidence in the careful and conscientious decision-making undertaken on their behalf.”

Section 20 of the OCA empowers a “court” to make an interim order in any application for a “proceeding suppression order”. In addition, s.26 of the OCA gives the Magistrates’ Court power to make a “broad suppression order” prohibiting the publication of any specified material, or any material of a specified kind, relevant to a proceeding that is pending in the Court if in its opinion it is necessary to do so in order not to-

(a) prejudice the administration of justice; or

(b) endanger the safety of any person.

The following provisions of the OCA also apply to suppression orders:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SECTION** | **SUBJECT MATTER** |
| 21, 26(2), 26(3) & 26(4) | Where a suppression order applies. |
| 22, 26(5) | Provides exceptions for the conduct of the proceeding, recovery or enforcement of any penalty imposed in the proceeding or informing persons of the existence of suppression orders or interim orders |
| 23, 27 | Offence to contravene proceeding suppression order, broad suppression order or interim order. Maximum penalty for an individual is level 6 imprisonment or 600 p.u. or other. Maximum penalty for a body corporate 3000 p.u. |

The OCA does not, in its express terms, apply to the Children’s Court: see definition of “court or tribunal” in s.3. However, it is the opinion of the writer that s.528(1) of the CYFA makes those provisions of the OCA which invest jurisdiction on the Magistrates’ Court equally applicable to the Children’s Court. The Director of Criminal Law Policy of the Department of Justice and Community Safety has advised the Principal Registrar of the Children’s Court that-

“The Children's Court was considered as the [OCA] was drafted. It was not specifically listed as a 'court' able to make suppression orders, as the provisions of the CYFA already provided a statutory ban to the publication of material coming out of the Court - rather than providing the power to make a suppression order.

In developing the provisions about broad suppression orders, the aim was generally to replicate the current powers of the Courts, rather than to create any new powers. So in so far as the Children's Court can exercise the powers of the Magistrates' Court under s.528(1), it retains the power to make any order that the Magistrates Court can make. There was certainly no intention for the OCA to be interpreted as narrowing s.528(1) of the CYFA.”

The relationship between s.534 of the CYFA [formerly s.26 of the CYPA] and the power of the Supreme Court to make suppression orders [now under s.17 of the OCA, formerly under ss.18-19 of the *Supreme Court Act 1986*] is illustrated by the case of *R v SJK & GAS* [2002] VSC 94. Bongiorno J had sentenced each of the child accused to a term of imprisonment of 6 years with a non-parole period of 4 years for manslaughter of a frail 73 year old woman. At the commencement of the plea on 11/10/2001 His Honour had made an order pursuant to the inherent jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and ss.18-19 of the *Supreme Court Act 1986* that “any report of a proceeding in this Court that contains any particulars likely to lead to the identification of SJK and GAS is prohibited until further order”. On a Crown appeal the Court of Appeal increased the sentences to 9 years with a non-parole period of 6 years: see *DPP v SKJ & GAS* [2002] VSCA 131. The Court of Appeal did not interfere with the suppression order. On 15/08/2006 solicitors for the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd, being apparently unaware of the existence of the suppression order of Bongiorno J, applied to the President of the Children’s Court pursuant to s.26(1)(a) of the CYPA for permission to publish the names and photographs of SJK & GAS. Judge Grant dismissed the application, observing, *inter alia*, that he would not consider the application because of the suppression order made by Bongiorno J. On 07/09/2006 solicitors on behalf of the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd filed a summons in the Supreme Court seeking an order that the suppression order made by Bongiorno J on 11/10/2001 be vacated. Gillard J held that the suppression order should not be discharged: see *R v SJK & GAS* [2006] VSC 335. In the course of his decision Gillard J held-

(i) {At [32]-[34]} Section 26 of the CYPA applies to criminal proceedings which have been heard and finalized in the Supreme Court {*DPP v R & T* [Supreme Court of Victoria-Cummins J, unreported, 15/08/1995] referred to}.

(ii) {At [35]-[37]} Section 26 of the CYPA does not oust the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court founded on both ss.18 & 19 of the *Supreme Court Act 1986* and its inherent jurisdiction to make a suppression order. The jurisdiction vested in the President of the Children’s Court by s.26 of the CYPA is a concurrent jurisdiction, it does not “cover the field”.

(iii) {At [39]-[43]} The principle protecting a young person from being identified in a criminal proceeding is well established and applies throughout the common law world. The observations of Rehnquist J in *Smith v Daily May Publishing Company* (1979) US 97 at 106-108 apply with equal force in Victoria:

* “While we have shown a special solicitude for freedom of speech and of the press, we have eschewed absolutes in favour of a more delicate calculus that carefully weighs the conflicting interests to determine which demands the greater protection under the particular circumstances presented.”
* “It is a hallmark of our juvenile justice system in the United States that virtually from its inception at the end of the last century its proceedings have been conducted outside of the public’s full gaze and the youths brought before our juvenile courts have been shielded from publicity.”
* “Publication of the names of juvenile offenders may seriously impair the rehabilitative goals of the juvenile justice system and handicap the youths’ prospects for adjustment in society and acceptance by the public.”
* “By contrast, a prohibition against publication of the names of youthful offenders represents only a minimal interference with freedom of the press.”

(iv) {At [46]} If the Supreme Court order was discharged, the applicant would still have to make an application to the President of the Children’s Court for permission under s.26 to identify the prisoners and publish a photograph of them.

(v) {At [49]} Bongiorno J thought it appropriate that a suppression order ought to be made. When the Court of Appeal increased the sentence, rehabilitation was a factor relevant to the sentencing exercise. The Supreme Court should continue to have control over the question of publication of the names of the prisoners. When each sentence has been fully completed [i.e. not just the non-parole period], a different view may be taken but whilst the sentences are still operating it is inappropriate to remove the control of the Supreme Court over the question of publication of the identity of each prisoner.

As at September 2011, the suppression order made by Bongiorno J in this case remained on foot: see *R v SJK & GAS* [2011] VSC 431.

For a discussion of some relevant authorities and relevant considerations for the exercise of a judicial discretion to order suppression pursuant to s.17 of the OCA [formerly s.126 of the *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989*], see the judgment of Williams J in *The Age Company Ltd v Dupas* [2003] VSC 312 at [10], [21], [28]-[33] & [34]-[40], the judgment of Hansen J in *AB v The Magistrates' Court of Victoria* [2003] VSC 378 at [22] & [30]-[37], the judgment of Kaye J in *The Age Co Ltd & Ors v The Magistrates' Court of Victoria & Ors* [2004] VSC 10 at [12]-[13] & [19]-[20]; the judgment of Kaye J in *DPP (Cth) v Corcoris and The Age (No.2)* [2005] VSC 142 and the judgment of Whelan J in *Herald & Weekly Times Ltd v Magistrates' Court of Victoria* [2004] VSC 194 at [10]-[18] & [22]. See also *Herald & Weekly Times Ltd & Others v Magistrates' Court of Victoria* [1999] 2 VR 672; *Commonwealth DPP v Magistrates' Court of Victoria* [2011] VSC 593.

For a discussion of the powers of a Supreme Court judge to make suppression orders whether pursuant to s.17 of the OCA [formerly ss.18-19 of the *Supreme Court Act 1958*] or in its former inherent jurisdiction, see the joint judgment of Winneke P, Ormiston & Vincent JJA in *In the Matter of an Application by Chief Commissioner of Police (Vic.) for Leave to Appeal* [2004] VSCA 3 at [2]-[3] & [23]-[47] and its references to judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada in *R v Mentuck* [2001] 3 SCR 442 & *R v O.N.E.* [2001] 3 SCR 487. [This decision of the Victorian Court of Appeal was upheld by the High Court of Australia.] See also *BK v ADB* [2003] VSC 129 per Nettle J; *R v Goldman* [2004] VSC 167 at [15]-[31] per Redlich J; *DPP v Carl Williams & Ors* [2004] VSC 209 at [15]-[20] per Cummins J; *AB v Attorney-General* [2005] VSC 180 per Hargrave J; *R v Condello (Ruling 2)* [2006] VSC 27 per Osborn J; ANN v ABC & XYZ (No 1) [2006] VSC 348 per Hollingworth J; *R v Strawhorn (No 2)* [2006] VSC 433 (Habersberger J); *The Queen v G* [2007] VSC 503 [Edited Version] (Whelan J); *General Television Corporation Pty Ltd v DPP & Others* [2008] VSCA 49 at [21]-[22]; *AX v Stern* [2008] VSC 400 at[4]-[7] per Warren CJ; *BY v Australian Red Cross Society & Others* [unreported, Supreme Court of Victoria-Vincent J, 31/10/1991]; *ABC v D1 & Ors; Ex Parte The Herald & Weekly Times Limited* [2007] VSC 480 at [65]-[71] per Forrest J; *AB v D1* [2008] VSC 371 per Kyrou J; *R v Mokbel (Ruling No.2)* [2009] VSC 652 per Kaye J; *R v Mokbel (Ruling No.3)* [2009] VSC 653 per Kaye J; *Lew v Priester (No.2)* [2012] VSC 153 per Davies J; *Victorian Institute of Teaching v QDP* [2021] VSC 844 per McDonald J.

For a discussion of the power to make suppression orders under s.75 of the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997* (Vic) see *Re XY* [2018] VSC 456 at [8] per Croucher J; *Re XY (No 3)* [2020] VSC 195 at [61] per Taylor J; *Re XY (No 4)* [2022] VSC 21 at [41]-[48] per Elliott J; *Re AB* [2022] VSC 235 at [30]-[48] per Tinney J.

In *AB (a pseudonym) v CD (a pseudonym); EF (a pseudonym) v CD (a pseudonym)* [2019] HCA 6 Nettle J invoked s.77RE(1)(a) of the *Judiciary Act 1903* (Cth) to make non-publication orders in circumstances where the risk of harm to children associated with a party to the proceeding were held to be “acute”.

In *Chairperson of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants v Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police* [2019] VSCA 154 the Court of Appeal (Whelan, Beach & Weinberg JJA) allowed in part an application to vacate or vary suppression orders, holding that revocation of the orders entirely would increase risk but varying the orders to permit disclosure to and by the Royal Commission in accordance with the *Inquiries Act 2014* and the *Witness Protection Act 1991*. In this process the Court applied *AB v CD* [2019] VSCA 28 and *AB v CD; EF v CD* [2019] HCA 6.

### **2.8.3 Section 10(5) of the *Witness Protection Act 1991***

Section 10(5) of the *Witness Protection Act 1991* prohibits – under a penalty of level 5 imprisonment – a person without lawful authority from disclosing information about the identity or location of a person who is or has been a participant in the witness protection program or that compromises the security of such a person. In *DPP & Anor v Dale & Ors* [2010] VSC 88 Beach J analysed the proper construction and operation of s.10(5) and its relationship with s.126 of the *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989* [now s.17 of the OCA]. At [48]-[49] his Honour said:

“A potential or threatened breach of s 10(5) of the *Witness Protection Act* does not mandate that in all circumstances the Court must make a non-publication order under s 126 of the *Magistrates’ Court Act* (or its equivalent, ss 18 and 19 of the *Supreme Court Act*). It remains necessary in each case for the Court to consider the terms of s 126 of the *Magistrates’ Court Act*. That is, the question is whether, in all the circumstances that have been established, is it necessary to make a non-publication order in order not to prejudice the administration of justice or endanger the physical safety of any person (referring only to paragraphs (b) and (c) as relevant in this case).

However, it must be said that it would be a very unusual case where a threatened breach of s 10(5) did not lead to the conclusion that a non-publication order was necessary (giving full allowance to the fact that the requirement that the order be ‘necessary’ imposes a high standard).”

## **2.9 Bail justices**

Under s.14(1) of the *Honorary Justices Act 2014* [replacing s.120(1) of the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*] the Governor-in-Council may appoint eligible lay persons as bail justices. Eligibility criteria are set out in s.14(2).

Under s.18 members of the public service who hold a "prescribed office" classification are bail justices without the need for any other appointment provided they have completed a course of training prescribed for the purposes of this section to the satisfaction of the Attorney-General. The "prescribed office" classifications are set out in reg.10 of the *Honorary Justices Regulations 2014* [S.R.No.110/2014].

The functions and powers of bail justices are set out in the *Bail Act 1977* [No.9008] and in the CYFA and include the hearing and determination of out-of-sessions applications:

* for remand or bail in relation to adult & child accused; and
* for interim accommodation orders in relation to children who have been taken by DFFH into safe custody but whose cases cannot be heard by the Children’s Court for more than 24 hours.

Although their role is of importance for the Children’s Court, bail justices do not fall within the definition of “Court” in s.504(2) of the CYFA, namely that “the Court consists of the President; the magistrates, the judicial registrars and the registrars of the Court.”

For more information about the roles of bail justices and Justices of the Peace see:

* <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/justices> (maintained by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety);
* <http://www.rvahj.org.au> (maintained by the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices).

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## **2.10 Court services**

For many years the **Salvation Army** had maintained a daily information and support service at the Melbourne Children's Court and some suburban & regional Children's Courts. The Salvation Army has now reprioritised its mission and no longer provides services at the Court. Special tribute should be paid to Brigadier Doreen Griffiths who provided generations of clients with support and succour at Melbourne Children's Court and to Major Vicki McMahon who was transferred to Bridgehaven after supporting children, parents and family members at Melbourne Children’s Court for 13 years.

However, the Salvation Army still provides a wide range of services for clients of the Court. These services – described in more detail on the Children’s Court website [tab “Help and Support” 🡺 “Support Services at Court” 🡺 “Salvation Army”] – include-

* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs;
* Homelessness services;
* Alcohol and other drug services;
* Employment Plus;
* Youth support networks and programs.

The following three court organisations provide free services at various Children’s Courts:

The **Court Registry** is where all documents relating to a case in that venue of the Children’s Court are filed. Registry staff cannot give legal advice or complete court forms on a person’s behalf but can provide assistance such as-

* help with finding forms and court lists;
* explaining court processes and procedures;
* explaining legal phrases or terms, rules and practices;
* giving information about how the Victorian court system works;
* providing general advice to enable a person to complete court forms;
* providing suggestions about other agencies that can give legal advice.

A **Court Support Coordinator** [CSC] is a specialist court staff member who has a background in social work and is available to provide information and to support court users whose cases are listed at Melbourne, Broadmeadows and Moorabbin Children’s Courts. A CSC’s role includes provision of-

* referrals to community support services;
* information about court processes to people who do not have legal representation;
* emotional support to people who are upset or seeking help.

A **Family Violence Practitioner** [FVP] is a specialist court staff member who provides support and assistance to persons attending the Melbourne Children’s Court for proceedings related to family violence. If a person is attending the court either as a result of experiencing or using violence, the FVP can assist the person-

* to understand the court process including what will happen at the court hearing and the different types of orders that can be made;
* to prepare a plan to keep the person safe at home and in and around the court buildings;
* to access available services in the community, including education, employment, crisis accommodation, counselling and wellbeing services;
* to access available services and programs in the community to stop using family violence.

However, the FVP is not able to provide mental health assessments, financial support or legal advice and is unable to negotiate matters with other parties.

A number of other organisations provide services for and/or at the Children's Court. These include the following:

### **2.10.1 Youth Justice**

At Melbourne Children's Court and at many other Children's Courts the Youth Justice Division of the Department of Justice and Community Safety has officers in attendance on each court sitting day to provide support, advice and practical assistance (which may include assistance in arranging accommodation) for young accused attending or brought before the Court. The officers also coordinate arrangements between regional offices of the Department and young persons who have been placed on supervisory sentencing orders by the Court or in respect of whom a deferral of sentence has been ordered. Youth Justice officers are also involved in the diversion process. There is also a dedicated diversion officer – entitled Children’s Court Youth Diversion Coordinator – present at each Children’s Court Criminal Division sitting. The role of the diversion officer is to undertake diversion assessments and make recommendations to the presiding judicial officer in relation to individual diversion plans.

### **2.10.2 Child Witness Service**

The Child Witness Service [‘CWS’] – which commenced operation in 2007 – is a specialist agency of the Department of Justice and Community Safety but is separate from the courts. The role of the CWS is to offer specialised support and practical preparation to assist children and young persons under the age of 18 years who are victims of or witnesses to a criminal offence and who may be required to give evidence in the Magistrates’ Court, the Children’s Court, the County Court or the Supreme Court.

The CWS’ specialist team of six social workers and psychologists help prepare child witnesses for court and support them during and after the case, fully explaining the case and providing a link with police and prosecutors and victims’ services. The CWS aims to reduce the trauma and stress which may be experienced by a child witness by:

* preparing the witness for the process of providing his or her evidence;
* familiarising the witness with the court process and personnel;
* supporting the witness through the criminal proceedings and court hearing; and
* supporting the principal carer throughout the legal process.

However, although the CWS supports and prepares child witnesses on an individual basis, the evidence is never discussed.

A dedicated unit, with child-friendly surrounds, the CWS also provides remote witness facilities by means of which a child witness is able – if the court so orders – to give evidence without being in the presence of the accused person in the courtroom or to have his or her evidence pre-recorded by a court officer.

The CWS does not provide a counselling service but can make referrals to appropriate agencies if additional support is requested.

Although the CWS is based in the Melbourne legal precinct, the service is state-wide and will support children giving evidence in rural regions as well as those giving evidence in metropolitan Melbourne.

Referrals to the CWS can be made by anyone. This includes Victoria police members, the Office of Public Prosecutions, legal professionals, other professionals or directly by the child or young person or his or her family. This can be done by phone, fax or email:

Phone: 1300 790 540

Fax: 9603 9202

Email: childwitnessservice@justice.vic.gov.au.

The CWS considers it important that a child or young person who may be required to give evidence is referred to the service as soon as possible after charges have been laid. It does not matter whether a decision has been made about whether the child or young person will need to give evidence.

The CWS has been assisting approximately 500 child witnesses in Victoria each year, many of whom are victims of serious crimes such as sexual assault or physical assault.

### **2.10.3 Court Network**

Since 2003 Court Network has provided volunteer "Networkers" each sitting day at Melbourne Children’s Court and most other Children’s Court locations to give information, assistance and support to court users.

### **2.10.4 Victoria Legal Aid**

There are duty lawyers from Victoria Legal Aid at all Children's Courts in the Melbourne metropolitan area and on mention days at all other Children's Courts in Victoria. They are available for children in family or criminal cases, and parents of children in family cases who need legal advice or representation in court. Most children are able to obtain legal aid free of charge.

For more information, call Victoria Legal Aid on (03) 9269 0120 or 1800 677 402 (for country callers) between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. Multilingual telephone information is provided in English and 11 community languages at certain times each week.

### **2.10.5 Interpreters**

Section 526 of the CYFA prohibits the Court from hearing and determining a proceeding without an interpreter if the Court is satisfied that a child, a parent or any other party to the proceeding has a difficulty in communicating in the English language that is sufficient to prevent him or her from understanding or participating in the proceeding. The role of a court interpreter and the effect of an alleged mistranslation were explained by the High Court in *DVO16 v Minister for Immigration and Border Protection; BNB17 v Minister for Immigration and Border Protection* [2021] HCA 12 at [4]‑[8]. Qualified and accredited interpreters are available when needed and can be booked through the registry of the relevant Children’s Court. Arrangements must be made with as much notice as possible to ensure that an appropriate interpreter is available.

### **2.10.6 Mental Health Advice and Response Service [MHARS]**

The Children’s Court Mental Health Advice and Response Service is a specialist mental health service delivered by Orygen Youth Health at Melbourne Children’s Court. The MHARS clinician is available-

* to provide mental health assessments for eligible young people appearing before the Children’s Court who present with suicidality, acute mental health concerns and/or distress while awaiting their court appearance;
* to advise the Court whether mental health concerns are present or whether factors related to mental health may have a bearing on the proceedings;
* to facilitate timely access for an eligible child to appropriate treatment and mental health support.

To be eligible for assistance by MHARS a young person-

* must be aged 10-18; and
* must be an accused in proceedings in the Criminal Division of the Children’s Court or be subject to Family Division proceedings in which a secure welfare placement is possible; and
* at least one of the following criteria must also be met-
* there are concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of the young person; or
* the young person is engaging in expressing a desire to engage in deliberate self-harming behaviours, or is expressing suicidal ideation, or is having thoughts to harm others; or
* the young person’s judgment is severely impaired due to the effects of drugs and/or alcohol use or any undetermined reason.

Referrals to MHARS may be made by phone or email and may be initiated by a wide range of people, including-

* judicial officers and Court personnel;
* legal practitioners;
* Victoria Police, DFFH and Youth Justice;
* family, support people and self-referrals.

On the Children’s Court website tab “Help and Support” 🡺 “Support Services at Court” 🡺 “MHARS”.

### **2.10.7 Education Justice Initiative**

The Victorian Government’s Education Justice Initiative [EJI] is a program run by the Department of Education and Training [DET] and supported by the Children’s Court of Victoria. It re/connects young people appearing before the Criminal Division of the Children’s Court with supported educational pathways that suit their needs and interests.

In *DPP v Nelis* [2022] VSC 50, in the context of sentencing a 38 year old offender on a charge of manslaughter based on criminal negligence, Lasry J said at [22] [emphasis added]:

“Your childhood was affected by violence and instability. As a teenager you lived in Geelong and Perth. You were in the latter city because of your mother’s new relationship. You suffered at the hands of both your mother’s partner and an uncle while you were there. You returned to Victoria after spending six months in Perth. Your education finished after year 11, having been intermittent for several years. I pause to note that this is a typical scenario**. It is the case that a very large number of troubled individuals who find themselves in the criminal justice system have an incomplete and unsatisfactory education.** **Those who are vocal about reducing criminal activity should pay careful attention to education as a means of diverting young people away from being tempted to commit criminal offences, particularly when a drug habit has become entrenched in their lives.**”

It was precisely this philosophy that led to the setting-up of the EJI as an initiative of Judge Couzens, a former President of the Children’s Court, in August 2014.

The EJI is available to young people who are 10-17 years of age and who currently have a matter before the Criminal Division of a Children’s Court at locations listed below or at any Koori Children’s Court.

|  |
| --- |
| **CHILDREN’S COURTS WITH EJI SERVICE** |
| **MAINSTREAM CHILDREN’S COURT** | **KOORI CHILDREN’S COURT** |
| Melbourne | Melbourne |
| Bairnsdale | Bairnsdale |
| Ballarat |  |
| Benalla |  |
| Bendigo |  |
| Broadmeadows |  |
| Dandenong |  |
| Frankston |  |
| Geelong | Geelong |
|  | Hamilton |
| Heidelberg |  |
| Latrobe Valley | Latrobe Valley |
| Mildura | Mildura |
| Moorabbin |  |
|  | Portland |
| Robinvale |  |
| Sale |  |
| Shepparton | Shepparton |
| Sunshine |  |
| Swan Hill | Swan HIll |
| Warrnambool | Warrnambool |
| Werribee |  |
| Wodonga |  |

On receipt of a referral, EJI will work with the young person and their family or support person and/or case worker to link with the most appropriate school, education or training provider. The EJI accepts referrals from:

* young people and/or their families;
* judicial officers;
* Victoria Police;
* Department of Justice and Community Safety officers;
* Department of Families, Fairness and Housing officers;
* other relevant support services the young person may be involved with;
* legal representatives;
* past schools or training providers;
* other Department of Education staff.

To make a referral to EJI, download and complete an EJI referral form from the Department of Education website, ensuring that the child (if a mature minor) or the child’s parent or person who has parental responsibility for the child (in any other case) has read, understood and signed the form.

On the Children’s Court website tab “Help and Support” 🡺 “Support Services at Court” 🡺 “EJI”.

