More needed on work safety laws despite recent gains

The ACTU supports a recent vote by state and federal WHS ministers to regulate psychosocial hazards.

This decision is a huge step forward for the prevention of mental illness and towards addressing sexual harassment and gendered violence in the workplace.

Regulation on psychosocial hazards will place a positive obligation on employers to minimise and eliminate hazards to mental health from the workplace – just as they are required to in relation to physical hazards.

Unfortunately, several ministers representing coalition governments voted to prevent action on industrial manslaughter in our model Work Health and Safety laws.

Millions of workers will not have this important protection and employers will not be held accountable for preventable workplace deaths.

New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia will continue to lag behind the rest of the country on industrial manslaughter laws.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien said Australia was one of the only developed nations in the world to not have equal protections for physical and mental health and safety.

"Up to 45 per cent of mental health issues are attributable to work – requiring employers to take preventative action on this is a massive step forward," he said.

"This will include tackling the causes of sexual harassment at work, a key step in making work safe for women.

"Years of campaigning from working people and their unions, along with the support of mental health and gender equality organisations have gone into winning this regulation – it will make Australian workplaces safer for future generations of workers.

"We will continue to fight for industrial manslaughter legislation. Workplaces in Tasmania, SA and NSW would be safer for workers if employers could be held accountable for preventable deaths. It should not matter what post code your loved one dies in as to whether you receive justice."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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