

Community Rally Demands Justice Reform

24 Women Killed in 19 Weeks - Counted as Statistics - Remembered as Lives Lost

TOMORROW, Saturday, 10th May at 12pm, the aunt of 18-year-old murder victim, Emerald Wardle, will be co-hosting the *Community Rally Against Violence* in Newcastle, to honour her niece and all women and children who fall victims of heinous crimes.

“So far this year, 24 women in Australia have been murdered, and by the time we rally, that number could sadly be higher. This is a heartbreaking reality we can no longer ignore,” said Ms Smith.

“On Saturday we’ll be walking and calling for critical change to the justice system that failed Emerald, our family and many other victims of violent, heinous crimes against women and children,” she said.

Ms Smith who played a critical role in initiating amendments to the *Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020* and the *Mental Health Act 2007* that strengthened oversight and governance in forensic mental health matters, was in the gallery to witness the bill being presented by The Hon. Rose Jackson.

“While we’re deeply grateful for the recent changes to legislation that the Member for Orange, Philip Donato MP advocated for and the Minister for Mental Health, The Hon. Rose Jackson implemented, more needs to be done to protect the community when forensic patients are released, as the changes don’t go far enough,” Ms Smith said.

“With the support of Advocacy Australia, we and other victims of family members who have been brutally killed will continue to fight to protect the community from these killers even if the NSW Government, the Opposition and the Greens object to these important changes that will save lives,” said Ms Smith.

After Emerald’s young life was brutally taken by her boyfriend in 2020, Ms Smith says Emerald and her family were failed by a system that treated her cherished niece as just another statistic.

In April 2024, in the Court of Criminal Appeal, Emerald’s killer successfully overturned his murder conviction and a maximum 20-year sentence to be ‘act proven but not criminally responsible’, with oversight of the killer transferred to the Mental Health Review Tribunal.

The Mental Health Review Tribunal with its unprecedented, autonomous powers, makes decisions about the treatment and supervision of forensic patients and conducts reviews that can grant known killers leave from a facility that Ms Smith says not only fails to meet community expectations but poses serious risks to the wider community especially women and children.

“Emerald lost her young life at the hands of her boyfriend, a person she trusted, and then to learn that her killer was granted day release by the Tribunal and was using dating apps, was devastating,” she said.

“This rally is extremely important to me as not once in the last four years has Emerald, our family or the community be considered in the decisions that have been made around this case.

“When will victims of crime and their families be considered when these decisions are being made,” Ms Smith said.

“This needs to change. The victims must be given appropriate consideration in these matters and the safety of the community must be the priority not just needs of the perpetrator,” she said.

“There will never be an end to our overwhelming grief knowing that Emerald’s killer, a forensic patient, can be released without the same checks and balances as convicted murderers when granted parole, including ankle bracelet monitoring for known killers and other violent forensic patients, like Emerald’s killer, as proposed by Mr Philip Donato MP” Ms Smith said.

“The system with oversight of forensic patients’ needs a complete overhaul, and on Saturday when I join many who hope to prevent the same tragic acts of violence against women and children, I’ll be calling on the NSW Government to step up and hear our voices crying out for support.

“While I’m incredibly grateful to all those who supported the amendments to the legislation, there is still so much more that needs to be done and we’ll continue to fight for continued change to legislation and hold to account the Office of the Department of Public Prosecutions, the courts, the Mental Health Review Tribunal and NSW victim services for the decisions made that impact all victims of heinous crimes and the wider community.

“When we walk on Saturday as part of the *Community Rally Against Violence*, we’ll be saying NO MORE to the violence so many Australian women and calling on the NSW Government to hear our pleas to end the violence and implement vital changes to achieve this,” Ms Smith said.

“We need our parliamentarians to put politics aside and stand with us - the people, the victims, and the families left behind. It’s time for courage, not complacency. Enough is enough. It should not take a personal experience for our leaders to recognise the urgency. The time to fix this fractured system is now.” said Ms Smith.

Ms Smith and other advocates will meet at Newcastle Museum and march to Foreshore Park to stand together for the 24 women who’ve already lost their lives during the 19 weeks of 2025 - to demand real action from the NSW Government.

“We will be walking for my niece Emerald Wardle who was a beautiful and kind young woman, and all victims of heinous violent crimes so we hope the community will join us and bring their loved ones, their signs and their voices to help us create noise that cannot be ignored to bring about essential change,” Ms Smith said.

Clare Collins, Chair of Advocacy Australia said, “Only by standing together to say NO MORE violence against women and children, can we as a society ensure a safer future for everyone.

-ENDS-

COMMUNITY RALLY AGAINST VIOLENCE - NEWCASTLE

Date: Saturday 10th May 2024

Starts at 12:00md: Newcastle Museum 6 Workshop Way, Newcastle NSW 2300

Ends at 3:00pm: Newcastle Foreshore

KRISTY SMITH – Emerald Wardle’s Aunt

Ms Smith will share Emerald's story at the event and speak about her family's push for legislative reform after being devastated by the justice system.

HASHTAGS

#justice4em #RallyAgainstViolence #StopViolenceAgainstWomen #JusticeForVictims #VictimsOfCrime

INTERVIEW REQUESTS

To interview Kristy Smith, please contact Clare Collins at Advocacy Australia.

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ABOUT ADVOCACY AUSTRALIA - advocacyaustralia.org.au

Advocacy Australia aims to promote and defend the rights of victims of serious crimes and the families who've been affected by horrific circumstances such as murder, suspicious disappearance and abduction, and works to uphold their right to the truth, redress, protection and to be treated with respect and understanding.

The services provided are completely un-funded. All are conducted in a pro-bono capacity by Board Directors, Clare Collins (Chair) and Alice Collins (Secretary). To continue to provide support for victims such as Kristy Smith, funding is desperately needed. A registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission, Advocacy Australia has tax-deductibility status with the ATO to make a donation visit www.advocacyaustralia.org.au