# Pressure mounts to give power back to local communities to curb family violence

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### The City of Casey case revealed gaping weaknesses in Victoria’s planning and liquor laws that prevents communities from stopping domestic violence.

Daniel Andrews’ election night declaration that family and domestic violence remains Victoria’s number one law and order issue provides the right opening for his Government to complete the job and act on the outstanding Royal Commission into Family Violence’s recommendation to overhaul Victoria’s liquor laws.

Victoria’s politicians and legislators are on notice to ensure there is no repeat, ever, of an inexcusable case of detrimental enactment of legislation, which has left the City of Casey, an outer-Melbourne municipality, powerless to safeguard its community from threats of alcohol-fuelled family violence.

It was pleasing to hear the Premier reaffirming his commitment to tackling family violence and investing in this area. However, regrettably, meaningful action is years overdue for the community of Casey.

Work by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) at La Trobe University shows the strong correlation between the density of ‘big box’ liquor outlets and family and domestic violence.

Their most [recent study](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CITY_OF_CASEY_FINAL.pdf), which was launched this week, showsthe alcohol industry freely exploits Victoria’s weak, narrow liquor licensingand planning laws, despite emphatic evidence-based objections by localauthorities.

The CAPR report details how the City of Casey, backed by other councils, police and welfare groups, failed to stop a Dan Murphy’s big box store being built in the middle of a “family violence hotspot”.

The report underscores that new liquor licence applications are approved ‘by default’, with 97 per cent of applications given the green light under Victoria’s existing planning and licensing systems.

The report unpacked why local government attempts to stop or restrict new alcohol outlets are futile, exposing two key shortcomings in the Planning and Liquor laws.

First, Casey’s objections on the basis of increased risk of domestic violence and alcohol harm were largely considered ‘out of scope’ in planning decisions, and, second, harm minimisation was not adequately considered in the liquor licensing process.

Therefore, despite the support of Victoria’s Chief Commissioner of Police, the Council was powerless to advance arguments in the courts because legislation didn’t allow it.

The report stated that the City of Casey outcome will have a chilling effect on other local governments in attempts to refuse or object to new packaged liquor licences in the future.

This is a woeful case study of a municipality where the rate of family violence outstrips its rapid population growth. There is indisputable evidence that increasing the density of alcohol outlets is associated with higher rates of violence and chronic health conditions.

This strong correlation was highlighted in the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence. And despite the Victorian government investing more than $1 billion, no action has been taken to address this glaring problem of the alcohol oversupply.

The Andrews Government’s re-election is now an opportunity to renew efforts to stop alcohol-related family violence. Two years on from the Royal Commission it is disappointing that the state government had not taken this very simple, low-cost step, which would give local communities a fair voice in the licensing of big box liquor stores in their municipalities.

It is time complete the job and for the Government to strengthen the Liquor Act to enable local government and the community to stem the proliferation of alcohol outlets in their area because of the threats to community safety. To support this aim, it is essential that the second phase of the review of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* is undertaken as soon as possible.

It is time to put the safety of women and children before those of the powerful alcohol industry in deciding what’s best for the wellbeing of local communities that are deeply impacted by alcohol-related family violence.

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