

STATE OF TASMANIA v STEPHANIE LAURA CHARLES
COMMENTS ON PASSING SENTENCE

8 MAY 2026
ESTCOURT J

The defendant, who was 37 years old at the time of the offending, has pleaded guilty to two counts of assault. The child complainant is her son, who was 13 years old at the time of the offending. The defendant was his primary carer and they lived together in Bellerive. The adult complainant was 41 years old during the relevant period.

The defendant and the adult complainant had known each other for about 14 years. When they first met, the defendant was about six months pregnant with her son. They were in a significant relationship from about 2011 to 2013 but no longer are, although he is a father figure to her son. He also continued to help the defendant from time to time.

Around late March the defendant asked the adult complainant to help her move her mother's belongings into a storage unit. He agreed to help and on 26 March 2025, the pair and the defendant's son were together at National Storage in Mornington.

Whilst the defendant and the adult complainant were together in the storage unit, the pair got into an argument. The defendant picked up a broom stick and as he was walking away from the defendant, she jogged after him and hit him to the back of the head with the broomstick. His head immediately began to bleed and the blow caused him pain and caused him to stumble around for a period. The defendant turned away and went back into the storage unit.

The adult complainant followed the defendant back. Her son chased after the defendant and there was no further incident.

On 8 May 2025, at approximately 7:00pm, the defendant and her son were together at their home and he asked her to order some food via Uber Eats. He then stayed in his bedroom and did not eat any of the food before it went cold, which angered the defendant. She went into his bedroom and yelled at him and pushed him. She then picked up a blue weighted object, which was a helium balloon weight, which she threw at him. The object struck him above his eyebrow, splitting the skin and the wound began to bleed.

The defendant's son asked her to take him to the hospital but she refused, telling him that it was just a graze, and that she would look after the injury.

On 20 May 2025, the defendant was located at her residence in Bellerive and was arrested and taken to the Bellerive Police Station where she took part in a record of interview with police and, amongst other things, said that her son had said *"I'm hungry"*, so she said *"I ordered him Uber Eats, it was forty five dollars...I set it all out for him. I wasn't hungry so I didn't eat anything and um he just hadn't eaten it, he'd just left it all sitting there an um I just, I was busy doing something and then I came down and he just left it all and it was all cold and so I said, 'what are you doing?' like and then he was just really rude to me and so I just um pushed him away and we just yeah got in an argument and he was just really rude to me so I yeah I just threw something at him."*

She denied ever intentionally hurting her son, replying *"I love my son very much"*. She reiterated *"my intention isn't to hurt him by throwing...it was just to show him my frustration at his behaviour...he's nearly taller than me now"*.

The defendant was again interviewed on 23 May 2025, after the adult complainant provided police with information about the incident at the storage unit.

Amongst other things on interview, the defendant told police:

"I had been bugging him for a long time to come and help me at the storage unit. He has a four-wheel drive so he's able to put large items in the tray...I really needed him to do that. He really didn't want to, I'd been asking him all week, I'd been bugging him and he really didn't want to but he did but when he turned up there he was very angry...he didn't want to be there and he entered the storage unit and just started throwing my mum's possessions around and I just said 'just stop, just go, just get out' and he continued to throw things around...so I pushed him and he then scruffed me and threw me against the stuff [which is not accepted by the State] he was there for a long time holding me and when he let me go I picked up the broom and whacked him on the back of the head."

The defendant has no relevant prior convictions.

I have had the benefit of a pre-sentence report in which I am informed that the defendant reported an unstable and inconsistent upbringing marked by frequent interstate relocations due to her parents' employment, separation during her primary school years, and exposure to family violence perpetrated by her father, further exacerbated by alcohol use. Following the separation, she alternated living with each parent annually, which she described as disruptive to forming stable social connections. She reported a strained and now non-existent relationship with her father due to past violence and value differences, noting he later remarried and is believed to reside overseas. She reported currently experiencing significant stress as her mother's Power of Attorney and legal guardian due to advancing dementia, reporting the role has had a significant impact on her life, including exposure to physical aggression, challenges accessing appropriate care, and managing the sale of her mother's unit to fund residential aged care.

I am also informed by that report that as a result of the current matters, a restraint order is in place with her son named as the protected person. Following the offending, Child Safety Services placed her son in the care of her former partner, who we know is not the child's biological father (that, of course, is the adult complainant). She reported having no contact with her son since May 2025 and advised he does not currently wish to re-establish contact.

The defendant's counsel submits, somewhat at odds with the pre-sentence report, that the defendant accepts that her behaviour is a lack of control over her emotions and she resorts to violence when frustrated and does not know why. In any event, I note that Community Corrections have identified the defendant as suitable for a period of supervision. I note that she is also suitable for community service.

Community Corrections inform me that the defendant is receptive to engaging in interventions tailored towards addressing anger related issues, though expressed concerns regarding engaging in group intervention. She advised she would prefer an individualised approach. This can be accommodated. I am informed that case management interventions would focus on increasing pro-social supports and addressing criminal attitudes and antisocial behaviour. I am told the defendant presents with limited support networks, increasing her risk of reoffending. Interventions should include structured referrals to community, employment or training supports, and cognitive-based strategies to promote accountability, victim awareness,

emotional regulation, and problem-solving, with supervision to monitor compliance and reinforce behavioural expectations.

Fortunately, while these charges of assault are serious, the injuries were not. I have read a victim impact statement from the adult complainant, which I accept but treat with a healthy dose of scepticism given that I am advised that he has also been charged with assault arising out of the same circumstances, and there would appear to be some competition between him and the defendant and the defendant's son for affection and custody.

The defendant is convicted of both crimes of assault and is sentenced to a single period of 18 months' imprisonment, which sentence I wholly suspend on condition that the defendant commit no offence punishable by imprisonment for a period of two years.

In addition, I make a community correction order with an operational period of 12 months. The order will include all of the statutory core conditions and will include the special condition that the defendant must, during the operational period of the order, submit to the supervision of a probation officer as required by the probation officer. The order will also include a further special condition that "If directed by a probation officer, the offender must attend, participate in, and complete the EQUIPS Aggression Program as directed."

Finally, the order will include a condition that the defendant, within the operational period of the order, must complete 98 hours of community service.