

18 December 2014

The Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Via email: lacsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014

Dear Research Director,

I write to make a submission to the inquiry into the Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 on behalf of Community Legal Centres NSW. Community Legal Centres NSW (CLCNSW) is the peak representative body for Community Legal Centres (CLCs) in NSW.

CLCs are independent community organisations providing equitable and accessible legal services. CLCs work for the public interest, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalised people and communities. CLCs not only provide legal advice and assistance, but also encourage and enable people to develop skills to be their own advocates. We promote human rights, social justice and a better environment by advocating for access to justice and equitable laws and legal systems. CLCs work towards achieving systemic change through community legal education, and through law and policy reform. CLCs employ qualified staff including solicitors, social workers and community legal educators. We also have volunteer solicitors, barristers, law students and others working with us to extend our legal services. CLCs are both generalist and specialist centres.

Our submission relates to clause 80 of the Bill. CLCNSW is concerned by moves from governments around Australia to limit the law reform activities of Community Legal Centres.

An important strength of our democracy and aspect of freedom of expression is the freedom of civil society to criticise government. Clause 80 of this bill, which prevents Community Legal Centres from using Queensland Government funding to undertake law reform and advocacy, undermines our democracy and our freedom of expression. It also denies the Queensland Government the useful insights of Community Legal Centres, who see on a daily basis, the impact of government legislation and policies on the most vulnerable members of our community.

Community Legal Centres New South Wales recently produced a report on the effectiveness of law reform activities undertaken by Community Legal Centres. Please find a copy of this report attached.

The report found that law reform activities undertaken by Community Legal Centres:

- 'maximise the efficient use of resources
- further the objectives of government and
- support access to justice for all people, especially those most disadvantaged in Australian society.'¹

The report analysed 10 cases studies of law reform initiatives by Community Legal Centres. The report found that Community Legal Centres nationally spend about \$5million (or 10% of their resources on law reform activities) each year. The report found that one case study, the ban on mortgage exit fees, saved households \$50million each year.

Yours sincerely,



Alastair McEwin

Director

Community Legal Centres NSW

¹ http://www.clcnsw.org.au/cb_pages/adding_public_value.php