



Speech by

**Hon. M. FOLEY**

**MEMBER FOR YERONGA**

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Hansard 2 December 1999

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Legal Aid Queensland**

**Hon. M. J. FOLEY** (Yeronga—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for The Arts) (9.55 a.m.), by leave: Tomorrow is Legal Aid Queensland's 20th birthday. When Legal Aid Queensland came into being 20 years ago, it had 69 staff, eight regional offices and an annual budget of \$6m. Today, its staff numbers more than 300, it has 13 regional offices and an annual budget of almost \$50m.

Legal Aid Queensland's achievements over the past 20 years are too numerous to list. Over the past 18 months alone, it has increased community access to justice by putting information and a referral database on the Internet, launched an Integrated Indigenous Strategy to help overcome the effects of violence against women in remote Aboriginal communities, launched its Women's Justice Network in south-west Queensland, and the list goes on.

Over the past 18 months, Legal Aid Queensland's standards of excellence also have been recognised at a national level. In December last year, it won the prestigious Quality in Law Award, recognising outstanding achievements in the area of quality management and best practice in the legal profession throughout Australia. Legal Aid Queensland was one of only seven Australian organisations to reach the finals of this year's Australian Quality Awards for business excellence. And its client service centre has won two major awards since its inception in October 1997: the Queensland Public Sector Best Training Initiative Award in 1998 and the Australian Telemarketing and Call Centre Association award for Queensland call centre of the year with a staff of under 50.

But sadly, the past few years have not been all smooth sailing for Legal Aid Queensland. The Beattie Labor Government has boosted funding to Legal Aid Queensland by over \$5m a year more than it received from the previous coalition Government. But the Federal Government, whose lack of affinity with 20 year olds has become legendary— firstly, through cuts to welfare and, more recently, through its dastardly proposals for higher education—has shown an appalling neglect of Legal Aid. It has slashed funding to Legal Aid Queensland by \$2.5m a year and is refusing to reveal what is in store under the next round of Federal funding. Perhaps, as an indication of birthday goodwill or a little early Christmas cheer, the member for Warwick could end his stubborn muteness in relation to Federal funding for Legal Aid by calling on his colleagues in Canberra to do the right thing.

It is to the great credit of Legal Aid Queensland that it can continue to increase its services and maintain its standards of excellence, despite the savagery of the Federal Government's funding cuts. But make no mistake, those cuts have hurt, and those feeling the most pain are among the neediest in our society. Federal Justice Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone is impervious to this pain. In the Senate last week, she said this—

"The cut to Legal Aid funding made by this Government some time ago was in fact a call to the States to pay their fair share."

Senator Vanstone went on to say—

"With some pressure on the purse strings, I think you can make the case that it is in fact forcing the administration of Legal Aid in the States to look for more efficiencies and to find them for the benefit of people who need to use Legal Aid."

These remarks demonstrate that the Federal Government shows arrogant disregard for the rights of the battlers and the most needy in our society. On the eve of the 20th birthday of Legal Aid

Queensland, I can assure this House, and Senator Vanstone, that this organisation is highly efficient and that this Labor State Government is paying its fair share. We will continue to do all in our power to force the Federal Government to do justice to Legal Aid.

Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge this historic 10th anniversary of that great day when Wayne Goss and the Labor Party defeated the forces of corruption and reaction and led the Queensland people towards the sunlit uplands of hope and a fair go for all.

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