




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2017

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget, Community Legal Centres

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills) (2.25 pm): The federal government announced that it would not go ahead with its funding cuts for community legal centres. The federal Attorney-General said that the budget would include \$55.7 million over three years for legal assistance services across Australia. We welcome this announcement. It is pleasing that Canberra has finally listened to community concerns about community legal centres.

I would like to recognise and thank community legal centre staff and volunteers and the state body, Community Legal Centres Queensland, for their continuous advocacy against the previous expected federal government cuts. It is because of their determination, hard work and perseverance, working with our Queensland members of parliament, that the federal government has reinstated the funding. Their support for local communities has not gone unnoticed and I look forward to working with community legal centres into the future.

However, unfortunately we have been left in the dark about the details of this funding by the federal government. We still do not know how much Queensland will receive and the details of what funding is tied to. Because of this, we have not been able to tell our community legal centres how much extra funding they will get to run their service come 1 July. That means that some community legal centres still do not know what to tell staff. They do not know what services they will be providing in two months. They do not know how many clients they will be able to help. They do not know if they can sign contracts and leases. Some staff still do not know if they will have a job come 1 July. We know that this is hurting CLCs right now. Right now in our centres, staff do not have certainty and are leaving to find other employment.

Until the Commonwealth government makes it clear how much funding will be provided to Queensland and how it is to be applied, CLCs are left in limbo, not knowing whether they can continue services. Staff are left to wonder whether they will have a job after 30 June. As members can imagine, many people are simply looking for alternative employment. This uncertainty will also have a significant effect on service delivery for our most vulnerable Queenslanders in need of legal assistance when those CLCs are forced to recruit to replace staff who have left or, worse, staff whom they have had to let go because the Commonwealth government could not decide how the funding would be allocated between the states and territories. This is not good enough.

I am pleased to announce that the Queensland government is taking an unprecedented step to support the Queensland CLCs that will be impacted by Commonwealth funding delays from 1 July. A further \$565,000 of Queensland funding will be allocated as an interim measure for 22 impacted community organisations. This is in addition to the \$33.3 million of Queensland funding already allocated to community organisations over 2017 to 2020. The additional funding will provide vital funding certainty, enabling the community organisations to maintain current staff and services for a further three

months from 1 July, until the mess caused by the Commonwealth government can be sorted out. This did not need to occur. We have been asking for this funding for 18 months. To announce it a week out from the budget, with no detail and now saying that there will be a discussion paper about how to allocate funding that should never have been cut in the first place, is leading to significant delays and is causing harm to our CLCs.

This step reaffirms the Palaszczuk government's commitment to community legal centres and the vulnerable people who access their services every day while we work through the details of the Commonwealth's plan once it is made available. Making an announcement is simply not good enough. It is not enough that the funding needs of CLCs are not being provided right now. They need this money come 1 July. They need the details of how much funding we are getting for Queensland and what, if any, criteria is attached to that funding. We need that right now. I ask every member who has stood with our CLCs and campaigned to keep up that campaigning because a press release is not enough. We need the funding and we need it now.