

**The Honourable Yvette D'Ath MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Minister for Training and Skills**

**Function Name: Queensland Community Legal Centres
Conference**

Allocated Time: 30 minute concluding address

Function Time: 12:30pm – 1:00pm

Date: 27 May 2015

Venue: Park Regis, 293 North Quay, Brisbane

Acknowledgments

- Can I start today by acknowledging the traditional owners both past and present.
- Chair Janet Wight, director James Farrell and the team at QAILS
- Can I also start out by saying how pleasing it is to see such a strong turnout of community legal centre workers and by thanking you for the work you do. It's hard and often confronting work but I also know it is extremely rewarding and I want to place on record my government's appreciation for the efforts you put in every day.
- QAILS has once again brought us all together to celebrate your determination to deliver help and hope to vulnerable people when they need it most.
- The Palaszczuk Government is committed to genuinely working in partnership with your sector to constantly improve the co-ordination and delivery of the legal assistance we all strive to provide.
- And we will never shy from accepting your input, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. That's why among the first reforms of this government's first 100 days was to give you back the voice taken away by the previous administration.
- We listened to concerns raised by the legal profession about the 'no advocacy' gag clauses included by the previous government in the standard suite of contracts for purchasing social services, and acted without delay. However, we are concerned the latest round of federal funding has adopted similar gag clauses. Last week, state attorneys-general pushed hard for the gag to be lifted and we will continue to fight for your right to be heard.
- This government is committed to ensuring that your first-hand knowledge of issues at community legal centres is heard and becomes part of the decision-making process.
- I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your public advocacy on policy matters that helped me greatly as a shadow minister.
- And I must commend the sector – all of you here today – on the level of collaboration I have seen forged between your sector, all levels of government and the private profession. We are all working towards the same goals and only by encouraging true participation from people at every step of the process can we ensure those goals are reached.
- You have built strong relationships based on open communication channels that allow for clear and effective referral pathways for clients and a spirit of co-operation to deliver continuous improvement within the sector.
- Developing these productive and positive relationships is fundamental to the success of the sector and its ability to provide effective and efficient service delivery to Queenslanders.

- The importance of your unwavering commitment, hard work and dedication to encouraging quality service delivery, supporting information-sharing and maintaining effective referral processes is invaluable.
- You may not be surprised to hear that the media has focussed on the conflict-driven issues in my portfolio and made scant mention of the work we have been doing to ensure Queensland is a fair place for everyone, no matter where you live, how much you earn, your sexual orientation or the colour of your skin.
- I'd like to take this opportunity to inform a room of fellow professionals about some of the many steps we have taken to deliver on this aim.
- We are a government committed to getting it right by talking with everyone with a stake in our decisions, not just ramming through legislation in the hunt for a quick headline. If that takes time, then so be it.
- One review of relevance to your sector concerns the report of the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, which was given to the Premier in February.
- Sadly, the inter-generational societal ill of domestic and family violence is ever-increasing. In 2013-14, there were more than 66,000 reported incidents in Queensland — up from 53,000 reports in 2010–11.
- As legal assistance providers, I appreciate that you see the faces of the real people behind the statistics and I want to assure you this government will do everything it possibly can to reduce the stain of domestic violence and offer support to its victims. Again, the advocacy by QAILS for reforms is to be commended.
- The *Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic Violence* report contains 140 recommendations on how individuals, organisations, the broader community and the government can harness our energies into effective short and long-term action.
- I particularly draw to your attention the recommendations related to the justice system, including specialised magistrates backed up by interpreters, court-support workers, a domestic violence duty lawyer service, and increased access to perpetrator intervention programs. We are carefully considering these recommendations as part of a whole-of-government response to the report. It is important that we talk about domestic violence as a whole of community issue with measures needed across many sectors and agencies – not just the courts but also housing, social services and policing.
- I am also continuing the review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009* and thank many of you who have assisted by sharing your views and hard-won experience. It's anticipated a final report will be tabled by the middle of this year.
- Another of our initiatives shaping lasting change is the continued implementation of the 10-year Stronger Families reform program recommended by the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

- This program aims to drive a shift from demand on tertiary services to a system geared to early intervention and prevention.
- The justice reforms are directed to child advocacy services established under the Office of the Public Guardian – a new court case-management process for child protection matters in the Children’s Court and improved litigation to ensure services provided to vulnerable children and families get the job done efficiently, transparently and, most important, effectively.
- We will continue to work in consultation with stakeholders to advance these reforms into the future. It will be vital to work closely with the profession to monitor how these changes are progressing.
- The Palaszczuk Government has also committed to reinstating diversionary processes that will extend to our magistrates courts. We all know that real change, real benefits can be achieved through early intervention and prevention programs.
- By steering vulnerable defendants into rehabilitation and treatment, diversionary court processes can start to address the critical underlying causes of offending behaviour and keep young people and adults out of the criminal justice system.
- I look forward to working with the legal assistance sector and the wider community in turning these promises into reality and I thank QAILS for advocating measures to improve access to justice, including for people with mental health issues or disability.
- We have also pledged to reinstate the Sentencing Advisory Council and establish an independent crime statistical body to help guide future policy and improve engagement between the public, the legal profession and the judiciary.
- A referral will be made to the Queensland Law Reform Commission to investigate alternatives to incarceration, including consideration of the court-ordered parole regime and justice reinvestment models as a fundamental crime prevention strategy.
- This government will be tireless in our efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system. This is particularly important in my portfolio responsibility of youth justice, where the majority of youth in detention are indigenous.
- The previous government also significantly changed the philosophical approach to youth justice in Queensland. The Palaszczuk Government will repeal those 2014 amendments to the *Youth Justice Act* to bring Queensland back into line with the rest of Australia by recognising the fundamental principle that detention or imprisonment is a sentence of last resort.
- We are working on several reforms to benefit another group of Queenslanders – the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex community – including reviewing the so-called “gay panic” defence, the issue of civil unions and whether historical convictions for consensual sexual acts between males should be expunged from a person’s criminal record.

- Transparency is a cornerstone of the Palaszczuk Government we have taken steps to ensure the *Right to Information Act* is working as intended.
- As a strong advocate of community consultation and I am ensuring this review has been, and will be, comprehensive.
- I understand our RTI Act is well regarded by experts in the field, but there's always room for improvement, and lessons to be learned from those with hands-on experience.
- Some significant work has already been done on the review, and I thank QAILS and QPILCH for the contribution they have made to give voice to disadvantaged members of our community and their advocates.
- Our drive to restore of accountability and integrity includes ensuring Queensland's key anti-corruption agency, the Crime and Corruption Commission, operates in a culture free of fear or favour.
- We will appoint a new independent chair of the CCC and reintroduce the requirement for bipartisan support for certain key appointments. We will also revive the CCC's prevention function for corruption and remove the requirement for ministerial approval for the CCC's research activities.
- Further, the requirement for all complaints made to the CCC to be by way of a statutory declaration will be removed. We will clear the obstacles put in the way of whistleblowers.
- This government will also review the scope of the definition of 'corrupt conduct' brought in by the LNP as it sought to restrict the types of conduct within the remit of the CCC.
- The ball is well and truly rolling. In March, expressions of interest for appointment to the offices of the CCC chair, deputy chair, chief executive officer and commissioners were sought.
- The government is now moving to implement the balance of the CCC election commitments and I intend to introduce amending legislation by the end of this year, following targeted consultation on a draft Bill.
- Electoral reform is another chapter of an extremely broad reform package that shines a light on who is really backing the politicians of this state and their parties. I am proud that one of this government's first actions has been to pass legislation that lifted the cloak thrown over electoral donations by the previous administration.
- We are also getting rid unnecessary and discriminatory voter proof-of-identity requirements that effectively disenfranchised disadvantaged Queenslanders and cut them out of the democratic process. Again, I would like to commend QAILS for their submission to that review, which made sure the voice of your sector was heard.
- The Palaszczuk Government has made a host of commitments for the next three years to cut crime and improving the State's criminal justice system.

- As part of this Government's commitment to Keeping Our Community Safe, we are tackling serious organised crime in a comprehensive way, through broad consultation and with the advice of experts.
- This month saw the start of the Commission of Inquiry into Organised Crime headed by QC Michael Byrne. The commission is looking into organised crime as a whole, including major illicit drug markets, networked online child sexual offending, financial crimes, money-laundering, cyber-crime and violence and other forms of organised crime. The Commission will report to the Premier by October 30.
- We are establishing a high-level Taskforce, with representation from the Law Society, the Bar Association, the Police Union, the Police Service and government agencies to review the legislation known as the VLAD laws, and which was passed with scant public consultation or scrutiny.
- We will deliver more efficient legislation and develop a new serious organised crime offence for Queensland.
- In conclusion, I wish to address the all-important issue of funding to your sector.
- The Queensland Government invests in legal assistance services delivered by community legal centres and Legal Aid Queensland. Community legal centres will receive \$30.6 million in total over 2014-17 to provide free or low-cost legal services. Legal Aid Queensland received \$64.4 million in the 2014-15 financial year.
- Community legal centres are central to the co-ordination and provision of legal assistance. They work in partnership with Legal Aid Queensland to deliver vital generalist and specialist services to people who'd otherwise be on their own.
- You may be aware that state and territory Attorneys-General were concerned with federal funding cuts in these vital areas that were due to take effect from July. It just didn't make sense to make cuts to this sector at the very time that we are having a national discussion about domestic violence and closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.
- We worked hard to convince the Federal Government to reconsider and in March, the state government welcomed the announcement the Commonwealth would provide certainty for the legal assistance sector by guaranteeing current funding levels for the next two years.
- We can't rest there. Last week, state attorneys-general were told there are no guarantees post-2017 – the funding basically falls off a cliff. Be assured that I will continue to fight for proper funding, including through current negotiations on the National Legal Assistance Reforms. I urge you to keep up the pressure on the Federal Government.
- Thanks for making the time in your busy personal and professional lives to attend this valuable training and networking opportunity.
- I hope you have made some new connections over the past three days and broadened your skills and knowledge.

- Given how challenging your work can be, I hope you feel recharged and reinvigorated to continue your invaluable contribution to assisting the vulnerable members of our community to access justice.