



DV cash will not fix centre cuts

WHILE the Federal Coalition has pledged \$30 million over three years for family violence law services, both the Opposition and lawyers say community legal centres are still out in the cold as they try to work out how to absorb a \$34.83 million cut in funding.

Shadow attorney-general Mark Dreyfus said if Labor won the July 2 election, regional CLCs would be in line for a \$43 million boost.

"Community legal centres will fall off a cliff unless the government reverses its earlier cuts in full," Mr Dreyfus said.

"Many CLCs are struggling to keep their doors open."

In a media release, Attorney-General George Brandis and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash said a portion of the \$30 million would go to CLC domestic violence services.

"The \$30 million funding is part of the \$100 million in new funding over three years announced in the 2016 budget to implement the Third Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children," they said.

However, Daniel Stubbs from the National Association of Community Legal Centres said this did not cancel out the CLC funding cuts.

"It is difficult to understand why the government would provide CLCs with some share of \$10 million per year as part of this funding, but during the same period cut CLCs by 30% nationally," Mr Stubbs said.

"It is tantamount to paying for a new roof on a house but removing the foundations at the same time."



WORRIED: Suncoast Community Legal Service principal solicitor Julian Porter can see dark days ahead if the Federal Government funding cuts go ahead.

PHOTO: JOHN MCCUTCHEON

Funding cuts will see loss of legal support

Sherelle Moody
ARM Newsdesk

CUTS to funding mean hundreds of Sunshine Coast residents will be in legal limbo from July 1, 2017.

This is because the current Federal Government cut community legal centre funding by 30% in the 2014 budget.

Unlike the nation's capital cities, there is just one free legal service for our residents to turn to when they are facing problems relating to domestic violence, divorce and separation, child protection, employment, credit, debt and consumer contract issues, disability discrimination, tenancy and neighbourhood disputes and even minor legal issues including driving offences.

Locals who do not qualify

for legal aid and who do not have enough cash to hire private solicitors will often seek help at the Suncoast Community Legal Service.

The Suncoast Community Legal Service, which covers the Sunshine Coast and Noosa, gave 2864 pieces of legal advice last financial year.

The service also opened 80 new cases and did 40 community legal presentations.

While it's still unclear how much the centre will lose, it was announced in the 2014 Federal Budget that \$12.1 million would be cut nationwide in 2017-18, \$11.6 million would go in 2018-19 and a further \$11.1 million would be cut in 2019-20.

SCCLC manager Julian Porter said he was preparing for the funding cut to decimate the service's

domestic violence and family law services as the centre was forced to lose two full-time legal positions.

Mr Porter said the cuts could impact hundreds of residents.

"At the moment we've got the equivalent of two full-time lawyers doing family and domestic violence law," he said. "But come the middle of next year we'll have no paid lawyers handling domestic violence and family law."

"We're doing fundraising to try and keep people on - we're hopeful at some point he government will see how crazy the cuts are."

"It's just going to be disastrous."

Mr Porter urged Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, whose government announced the cuts, and Opposition Leader Bill

BY THE NUMBERS

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 ■ Opened 80 new cases.
 ■ Completed 40 community legal presentations.
 Source: The Suncoast Community Legal Service.

Shorten to make sure our region gets a fair go.

"In smaller communities like ours, a community legal service contributes massively to that feeling of being heard and having received some sound guidance which goes so far for the majority of more able people," Mr Porter said.

"For the most disadvantaged people in the community this just isn't enough and without lawyers on the ground to do those pieces of work for them, the problems just get worse and worse until they become the

whole community's problem."

There are 198 community legal centres across Australia. About 77% of Queensland's community legal centre services were provided to regional, rural and remote areas of the state in 2015.

Their support included 100,000 pieces of legal advice to more than 50,000 clients.

Amanda Alford from the National Association of Community Legal Centres said CLCs were often the only source of legal support for regional residents.

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