

Violence surges but no funds for legal service

PAUL WESTON

THE State Government in today's Budget will ignore a call to provide funding for a Gold Coast community legal service despite it servicing a record number of domestic violence cases.

Volunteer lawyers with the Robina Community Legal Centre need back-up from law students after recently delivering 37 advice sessions on a Thursday night.

The specialised domestic-violence court at Southport has recorded 941 domestic violence orders from January 1 to March 30 this year as the rise in reporting continues.

Legal centre president Ross Lee told the *Bulletin*: "This is a record and due to escalating demand our volunteers are

having trouble keeping up.

"The centre will see well over 1000 clients this year.

"In an age where tens of millions are being spent on legal and domestic violence assistance, RCLC volunteers do not understand why the State Government says it should not fund an employed co-ordinator and practice manager."

Mudgeeraba MP Ros Bates has tabled two petitions in Parliament calling for funding but Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath rejected the requests.

Ms Bates said the response from the Government to the petitions, which contained hundreds of signatures, showed the Attorney-General was "out of touch".

"Half of Robina Community Legal Centre's case load is made of up domestic violence

victims," Ms Bates said.

The Government has provided \$664,000 to the Gold Coast Community Legal Service and Advice Bureau in the past three years and it received more than \$1 million in Commonwealth funding.

But the Gold Coast centre operates from Southport and a gap exists for coverage to the south and across the border.

Ms D'Ath admits that she is "very concerned with the funding cliff that CLCs across the country" are facing due to the Federal Government reducing grants.

"I appreciate the dedication and work of the RCLC, wish them well in their endeavour to secure funding," she said.