



For release
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Crisis meeting in parliament for legal help providers

Members of Parliament, concerned citizens and community lawyers met in Parliament earlier today to discuss the overwhelming need for free legal help for vulnerable Queenslanders and the lack of funding to meet this demand.

The meeting took place at Parliament House this morning and saw Queensland State MPs, lawyers and staff from community legal centres discuss barriers faced by vulnerable people with legal problems, trying to navigate complex and inaccessible systems and institutions.

MPs Mark Furner and Michael Crandon took to the podium to talk about the work of community legal centres. Anne Lewis, Director of the North Queensland Women's Legal Service, spoke about the growing demand for legal services for victims and survivors of domestic violence facing family law cases, seeking protection from courts, or dealing with abusive ex-partners.

'62% of the women we help experience domestic violence, and we're just not able to provide the legal help they need,' said Ms Lewis. 'With inadequate funding, we are only able to answer 1 out of every 8 calls to our 1800 legal advice line at present from women who need help. More must be done,' said Ms Lewis.'

Bill Mitchell, Principal Solicitor at Townsville Community Legal Service, spoke about the additional difficulties faced by people in regional areas trying to access legal help.

'Our organisation provided advice across almost 200 different areas of law last year, including specialist areas such as family law, violence and abuse, seniors rights, social security and migration. Demand for our services is growing, and we'd love to be able to support more vulnerable people, but we just don't have the resources,' said Mr Mitchell.

James Farrell, Director of Community Legal Centres Queensland who convened the meeting, commented, 'Half of all Queenslanders will experience a legal problem this year and of this group we can only see six out of ten people. Queensland's community legal centres turn away more clients than any other state, and tens of thousands of people are missing out on the help they need. This meeting was an opportunity to talk with decision makers about this unmet need, and the ways that governments can support our work to ensure that people are able to get access to legal help, when they need it.'



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Mark Furner MP, Member for Ferny Grove, says his office regularly receives requests for assistance with legal matters ranging from unfair dismissal to domestic violence. “The free legal advice provided by local community legal centres is a valuable resource for people in Ferny Grove” Mr Furner said.

Michael Crandon MP, member for Coomera, agreed. ‘It is obvious that there is a massive need for support for people who are falling on hard times in a legal sense,’ said Mr Crandon. ‘Community legal centres must be supported to help those people who need access to justice in relation to domestic and family violence, and other Queenslanders who are having a tough time.’

Ends

NOTES:

Community Legal Centres Queensland Inc (formerly QAILS) is the state-wide peak body representing community legal centres in Queensland. Queensland community legal centres have 40 years of service delivery experience providing free information, advice and referral, casework and representation to the community. www.communitylegalqld.org.au

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