



Bribie Weekly Friday 17/02/2017

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Legal help to face cuts

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MEMBER for Pumicestone Rick Williams has warned that the Bribie Island community is at risk of losing free legal help for some of its most vulnerable people, with federal funding for community legal centres to be cut by 30% from July 2017.

Mr Williams said funding cuts could decimate free legal help across the region.

"Many of the people who visit my office have complex legal problems and it's critical that they get the help they need," he said.

"We see lots of people who need help navigating the child safety system, with family law problems, with problems around their housing that end up at QCAT – the list is endless.

"That's why it's vital that our community is able to access legal help."

Bribie Island Neighbourhood Centre manager Cecelia Taylor is concerned about how the cuts will impact the community.

"It's quite a distance for people to travel to and from Caboolture to access the nearest community legal service and it's a shame if they have to," Ms Taylor said.

"We expect if there's cutbacks in funding there will be cutbacks in services.

"I'm really hoping they'll reconsider it when they look at the need in

the community."

Moreton Bay Regional Community Legal Service visits the Bribie Island

Neighbourhood Centre to provide free legal help by appointment each month.

MBRCLS chief executive Laurence McMahon said the region needs more services and federal funding cuts will make this difficult.

"Our experience in this community shows that there are people with legal problems that just aren't able to access legal help,"

Mr McMahon said.

"It's difficult for people to get the legal help within the time they need it as our appointments are sometimes

booked up a month ahead."

An Office of the Attorney-General spokesperson said the Federal Government supports the important work of the legal assistance sector and is providing substantial funding to front-line services to help those who need it most.

"Even in a resource-constrained environment, the Australian Government is providing over \$1.6 billion for legal aid, community legal centres and indigenous legal assistance

between 2015 and 2020," the spokesperson said.

"Funding for the Pine Rivers Community Legal Service, which services Bribie Island, has increased by 75% under the Coalition and quadrupled since 2010."

Mr Williams has called on the federal Attorney-General to reverse the funding cuts to community legal centres.

"The Federal Government

needs to ensure that people can access the help they need," he said.

"I'm really hoping they'll reconsider it when they look at the need in the community."

— Cecelia Taylor



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IMPORTANT: Rick Williams and James Farrell hope the Federal Government will reconsider funding cuts. PHOTO: PAXTON ROTH