

19 March 2017

Open letter

## ***LAW SCHOOLS SUPPORT FUNDING FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES***

*As Deans of Australian Law Schools we write to express our concern at proposed Federal Government funding cuts to the legal assistance sector set to commence on 1 July 2017. We encourage the Federal Government to reverse this impending 'funding cliff' and to work with service providers to ensure adequate funding is available so that people across Australia can assert their legal rights and access justice.*

### ***Community Legal Centres – A Vital Part of the Legal Assistance System***

*Community Legal Centres are a vital component of a network of legal services that assist individuals with their legal problems, many of whom experience multiple disadvantages and who cannot independently navigate our complex legal system. Reduced funding will mean diminished service capacity which will have flow-on effects throughout the sector and ultimately on the effective and efficient administration of the justice system as a whole.*

### ***Australian Law Schools and Community Legal Centres – Clinical Partnerships***

*Australian Law Schools are proud of their enduring relationships with Australia's legal assistance sector, in particular through their partnerships with Community Legal Centres in the area of clinical legal education.*

*Many Law Schools strategically partner with Community Legal Centres to develop dynamic learning opportunities for law students in a clinical legal setting. Exposing students to public interest legal work is a central feature of a well-rounded legal education, and law clinics allow students to learn vital practical legal skills in a social justice context. Student interest in clinical legal education is extremely strong across Australian law schools, with high enrolments in law clinic courses.*

*The foreshadowed funding cuts will threaten our strategic relationships with Community Legal Centres to offer clinical legal programs. These partnerships rely heavily on the sustainability of Community Legal Centres to provide necessary infrastructure, supervision and human resourcing to support our law students. The funding cliff thus undermines our institutions' ability to educate the next generation of lawyers about the importance of access to justice in Australia.*

### ***A Long-Term Investment***

*We note the significant return on investment that Community Legal Centres could deliver through additional funding, as recommended by the 2014 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Access to Justice Arrangements. Implementing the Commission's recommendation to inject \$200 million per year into the sector will replenish the existing shortfall in funding and will represent the start of a long-term investment to support a resilient and sustainable legal assistance sector.*

*Community Legal Centres are a vital network of frontline organisations doing important work in the public interest. Funding cuts set to commence in 2017 will weaken the third mission of university law schools to effectively engage with our communities, as well as the overall efficiency of the Australian legal system.*

*We call on the Australian Government to reverse the cuts and invest in the legal assistance sector to promote access to justice for people across Australia.*

**Professor Michael Adams**

Dean, School of Law  
Western Sydney University

**Professor Stephen Bottomley**

Dean, Robert Garran Professor of Law  
ANU College of Law

**Professor Stephen Colbran**

Dean of Law  
CQUniversity

**Professor Kim Economides**

Dean, Flinders Law School  
Flinders University

**Professor Carolyn Evans**

Dean and Harrison Moore Chair of Law  
Melbourne Law School

**Professor Mark Farrell**

Head of School, Graduate School of Business and Law  
RMIT University

**Professor Sandeep Gopalan**

Dean, Deakin Law School  
Deakin University

**Professor Doug Hodgson**

Dean of Law  
University of Notre Dame

**Professor Dan Hunter**

Foundation Dean  
Swinburne Law School

**Professor Patrick Keyzer**

Head of School and Chair of Law and Public Policy  
La Trobe Law School

**Professor Wendy Lacey**

Dean & Head of School  
School of Law, University of South Australia

**Professor William MacNeil**

Dean and Head, School of Law & Justice  
Southern Cross University

**Professor Penelope Mathew**

Dean of Law & Head of School  
Griffith Law School

**Dr Trish Mundy**

Acting Dean of Law  
School of Law, University of Wollongong

**Associate Professor Maryam Omari**

Dean, School of Business & Law  
Edith Cowan University

**Professor Rocque Reynolds**

Dean of Law, Thomas More Law School  
Australian Catholic University

**Associate Professor Natalie Skead**

Dean and Head of School  
UWA Law School

**Professor George Williams AO**

Dean, Anthony Mason Professor, Scientia Professor  
UNSW Law

**Associate Professor Lorana Bartels**

Head of School of Law & Justice  
University of Canberra

**Dr. Jürgen Bröhmer**

Dean and Professor of Law  
School of Law, Murdoch University

**Professor Sarah Derrington**

Academic Dean and Head of School  
TC Beirne School of Law, University of Queensland

**Professor Adrian Evans**

Acting Dean, Faculty of Law  
Monash University

**Professor Paul Ames Fairall**

Foundation Dean of Law  
School of Law, Curtin University

**Associate Professor Alison Gerard**

Director, Centre for Law and Justice  
Charles Sturt University

**Professor Lesley Hitchens**

Dean, Faculty of Law  
University of Technology Sydney

**Professor John Humphrey**

Executive Dean, Faculty of Law  
Queensland University of Technology

**Professor Nick James**

Executive Dean, Faculty of Law  
Bond University

**Professor Natalie Klein**

Dean, Macquarie Law School  
Macquarie University

**Professor David Low**

Dean, College of Business, Law and Governance  
James Cook University

**Professor Paul Martin**

Acting Head of School of Law  
School of Law, University of New England

**Professor Reid Mortensen**

Head, School of Law and Justice  
University of Southern Queensland

**Professor Pamela O'Connor**

Head of USC Law School  
University of the Sunshine Coast

**Professor Margaret Otlowski**

Dean & Head of School, Faculty of Law  
University of Tasmania

**Professor Joellen Riley**

Dean and Head of School  
The University of Sydney Law School

**Professor Tania Sourdin**

Dean and Head of School  
Newcastle Law School

**Professor Melissa de Zwart**

Dean of Law  
Adelaide Law School