

Reprieve for legal services

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The Turnbull government has reversed damaging cuts to the community legal sector by committing an extra \$55.7 million in the budget following a months-long campaign from legal groups.

Attorney-General George Brandis announced on Monday that the government's 2016-17 budget will invest an additional \$39 million into community legal centres and \$16.7 million to Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Legal Services over the next three years.

A statement from his office said the community legal centre funding would prioritise frontline family law and family violence services.

Funding for the sector was set to drop by about 30 per cent, or \$34.83 million, from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020, as the Coalition blamed

the former Labor government for failing to provide funding beyond four years.

Labor has argued it followed normal four-year budgetary practice and has been calling on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to overrule Senator Brandis' cuts.

The cuts were set to hit Queensland the hardest, with several legal centres announcing they would have to close or cut services on June 30.

Experts warned that the cuts amounted to a "false economy" because they would lead to unresolved legal problems that would increase government costs elsewhere.

The government said its \$55.7 million, when combined with existing funding, represented the "largest ever Commonwealth investment in legal assistance services", amounting to a record \$1.73 billion.