

Frontliners in DV fight shut doors

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THE Robina Community Legal Centre, which provides free advice for hundreds of families fleeing violent homes, has closed after the Federal Government failed to intervene.

Mudgeeraba MP Ros Bates confirmed the closure and that she was seeking other funding options.

State Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath has announced \$51 million in State and Commonwealth funding for 36 community legal services, including \$2.5 million for the Gold Coast Community Legal Service at Southport.

But the Government ignored requests to fund the Robina service, which relies on the council providing rent assistance, the help of university students and fundraisers like sausage sizzles.

Opposition domestic and family violence prevention spokeswoman Ms Bates described Labor's decision as "shameful" given the Coast "was the epicentre of dom-

estic violence" after the deaths of Tara Brown, Shelsea Schilling and Teresa Bradford.

"This is a free, frontline, all-volunteer legal service being ignored by Labor as it struggles to keep its doors open," Ms Bates said.

"Domestic violence victims on the southern Gold Coast may have nowhere to turn for help and support with complex legal matters."

Robina CLC president

Ross Lee said the decision came weeks after the Robina CLC won the Queensland Law Society's Community Legal Centre Member of the Year Award.

"We are bitterly disappointed to have again received nothing from the Queensland Government despite the rises in our caseload and the services we provide to countless vulnerable Gold Coasters," he said. "Our work has been recognised throughout the legal community and by our Gold Coast representatives, but we've been ignored again."

Mr Lee and his team of volunteers were holding cri-

sis meetings to determine the fate of the service.

"The personal sacrifices are not sustainable," he said.

"Our future is now uncertain and our committee will meet to discuss our next step."

Mr Lee said volunteers were shocked to learn that the Australian pro bono program of the year and Queensland CLC Member of the Year could be given zero funding.

The Robina service began in 2014 and last year helped 1353 clients, many of them fleeing violent homes.

The funding of volunteer legal services that provide advice on complex family disputes has become a political football, with both governments blaming the other.

Ms D'Ath said the State Government was covering 60 per cent of the costs of services after Canberra slashed \$2 million from Queensland services.

Ms Bates acknowledged funding for community legal centres had been cut but argued the money had been replaced with other funding packages.

[▲](#)
back



MP Ros Bates says she is looking at funding options to save the Robina Community Legal Centre. Picture: MARC ROBERTSON