

Legal aid faces cuts

David Alexander

A LOOMING funding cut to community legal centres could leave vulnerable Pine Rivers families

without urgent legal assistance.

The Federal Government plans to cut \$2million from the state's Community Legal Centres by July 1, but claims the frontline services

received a funding boost under the Coalition. Centres, including Pine Rivers Community Legal Centre, face a funding cut of 30 per cent.

"The situation is untenable because it means 'early' access to legal advice and information for those who cannot afford a solicitor will be almost impossible," principal solicitor Louise Skidmore said.

"If the service has to close some days of the week and be less available, then a vital link in community support will be missing."

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Call to head off cuts to community legal help

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"Especially in the area of family and domestic violence where it has been well established that access to legal advice is essential."

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Yvette D'Ath urged the Federal

Government to reverse the funding cuts.

"These people are among the most disadvantaged in our communities and we need to support them as much as possible and think about how much we can help them," she said.

However, Dickson federal

Liberal MP Peter Dutton, whose electorate covers the Pine Rivers Community Legal Service, said funding for the centre had actually increased by 75 per cent under the Coalition and quadrupled since 2010.

"Total Commonwealth funding to Queensland Com-

munity Legal Centres has also increased by 40 per cent under the Coalition Government," he said.

The Pine Rivers centre helped more than 5000 people in 2016 with legal advice and information. Ms Skidmore said people struggling with family separation,

children's matters, debt and family violence came into the centre on a daily basis.

"Our organisation is calling on Malcolm Turnbull and George Brandis to reverse this decision to ensure people in the Pine Rivers area get the legal help they need," she said.

FUNDING CHANGE

Pine Rivers Community Legal Service funding:

2010-11: \$62,480

2011-12: \$119,868

2012-13: \$182,026

2013-14: \$145,964

2014-15: \$244,418

2015-16: \$249,407

2016-17: \$253,398

■ With 30 per cent cut:
\$168,763