

## THE LEGAL BATTLE

THE courtroom battle for female victims of violence is an uphill one in Townsville with free legal services on the brink.

Townsville ranked in the top four towns for the highest number of domestic violence protection order applications in Queensland with police responding to 376 domestic violence matters a day and up to 90 matters before court in a day.

The North Queensland Women's Legal Service respond to 6000 legal requests each year and has seen a 60 per cent increase in the number of women calling its Legal Advice Line for help in the past year to access the free service — which includes a domestic violence duty lawyer.

"For every eight calls that go to the advice line we can only answer one and if proposed cuts are made that means we will be unable to respond to 2000 legal requests," supervising solicitor Sharell O'Brien said. "Our services at the moment are under pressure, like a lot of the services on the frontline, and now the Federal

Government is looking at cutting 30 per cent of community legal centre funding across the country and if we lose that amount we will struggle.

"For women if they lose that support they may not be empowered to stand up and go through the court process alone — it could very likely re-traumatise them."

The Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland is investigating ways to outlaw discrimination stemming from domestic violence cases to help remove the stigma around making and pursuing complaints. "Unfortunately, there is no attribute that covers domestic violence under the Anti-Discrimination Act, but there has been talk of it being covered giving them the opportunity to realistically pursue complaints through a jurisdiction like ours if they've been treated less favourably because they're victims of domestic violence," said Anne Franzmann, regional manager for the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland.



NQ Women's Legal Service supervising solicitor Sharell O'Brien and Anne Franzmann from the Anti-Discrimination Commission.