
Law Council of Australia
National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Legal Services Forum
National Legal Aid
National Association of Community Legal Centres

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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Dear Sir or Madam,

Inquiry into value of a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia

About ALAF

The Australian Legal Assistance Forum (ALAF) is a body comprised of the major legal assistance client service deliverers in Australia. These organisations are:

1. National Legal Aid representing the Directors of all legal aid commissions in Australia and through them those commissions.
2. The Law Council of Australia representing Australian lawyers and their state and territory representative bodies.
3. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.
4. The National Association of Community Legal Centres representing community legal centres throughout Australia.

ALAF was established by us to enable us to consider and address legal assistance issues together.

Justice Reinvestment

ALAF endorses the submissions of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) and the Law Council of Australia (LCA) to the Inquiry.

ALAF supports justice reinvestment primarily because of its potential to reduce significantly social and economic exclusion of individuals, families and communities,

avoiding the adverse social impacts of incarceration described in the NATSILS and LCA submissions, and secondly because of its economic cost benefit to the community.

ALAF believes that a Commonwealth commitment to justice reinvestment is necessary to encourage and facilitate state and territory governments adopting and implementing justice reinvestment strategies. One example of how this could be done is by establishing a national body to provide expert advice and technical support on justice reinvestment and conduct, or coordinate the conduct of pilot justice reinvestment projects from which evidence could be collected to inform the delivery of future programs.

Ensuring strategies and programs are appropriate

ALAF believes that it is appropriate, and also critical to their success, that justice reinvestment strategies are developed in consultation and with the active involvement of the relevant community, particularly in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Data mapping

All legal assistance service providers have data relevant to criminal justice which we suggest could be useful in mapping areas of greatest need for justice reinvestment strategies and programs, and which could assist in the identification of communities likely to be interested in trialling a justice reinvestment approach.

ALAF representatives will provide any available data thought useful by the Committee.

Criminal justice experience

All ALAF legal assistance providers have experience in the area of criminal justice including in relation to various initiatives across the country; what works well, what does not, and why.

Fundamentally inter-related to criminal justice are matters such as physical, mental, emotional health, financial security, and education. In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, other matters such as cultural and spiritual connection and well being are also critically important. ALAF strongly advocates for the Inquiry to recognise the essential inter-relationship between legal assistance and other issues. Generations of families with poor health and limited education are caught up in the child protection, juvenile justice, and adult criminal justice systems. Improved understanding of complex and related issues and collaboration across providers, departments, and portfolios can only assist. For these reasons, ALAF urges the Committee to adopt an approach that supports real coordinated responses from government.

Conclusion

ALAF would welcome the opportunity to provide any information its members may have that the Inquiry would find useful and/or to appear before the Committee.

If we can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Louise Smith at the ALAF Secretariat.

Yours sincerely

Julia Hall
Chair
ALAF