



ATTORNEY-GENERAL

CANBERRA

MC14/23869

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

- 4 FEB 2015

Dear ~~Dr Jensen~~

Thank you for your letter of 30 October 2014 to the then Minister for Social Services, the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, regarding a petition from the Casey Cardinia Community Legal Service (reference number 960/1430). Your letter has been referred to me for response as it relates to a matter within my portfolio.

The petition relates to the cancellation, with effect from 30 June 2015, of additional funding allocated by the previous government to the Casey Cardinia Community Legal Service. The cancellation of this funding forms part of the legal assistance savings measure contained in the 2013-2014 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. The total savings to be achieved under this measure comprise \$43.1 million over four years. Nevertheless, the Government is very mindful of the need to structure those savings in a way which protects the most vulnerable clients of legal assistance services.

I have therefore directed that the funding of legal assistance services be focused on providing front-line services to disadvantaged people requiring legal help, rather than using public money for reform and advocacy activities. The Government funds legal assistance service providers to prioritise direct services to individuals. It is vital that vulnerable Australians receive the help they need with their legal problems.

The cutbacks to legal assistance funding reflect the gravity of the fiscal position which the Government inherited. In order to repair the Budget situation, and ensure that Australia is re-set on a path of growth and prosperity, the Government has been compelled to exercise stringent discipline in its expenditure.

The Government has aligned all Commonwealth legal assistance funding arrangements to end on 30 June 2015. This provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth, states and territories to work together with the sector to reform legal assistance arrangements from 1 July 2015. Proposed reforms are intended to support a sustainable legal assistance sector by ensuring that services are directed where they are most needed and are delivered in a more coordinated and streamlined way.

The Government's consideration of future funding arrangements will be informed by the findings of the review of the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services and the final report of the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Access to Justice Arrangements which was released on 3 December 2014.

Details of the new funding arrangements will be settled by Cabinet through the 2015-16 Budget process and cannot be released until they are announced on Budget night.

Thank you again for writing on this matter.

Yours faithfully \

(George\Brandis) /