

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

16 January 2009

Fair Work Bill 2008 – Exemption of community legal centre from requirement to seek leave to appear before Fair Work Australia

Dear Committee,

We write in support of the recommendation by Jobwatch Inc in its submission on the *Fair Work Bill 2008* (Cth) that community legal centres be exempt from the requirement to seek permission to represent clients before Fair Work Australia under section 596(1) of the Bill.

Our organisation is the peak body for Victoria's 52 community legal centres. We work closely with the National Association of Community Legal Centres.

Community legal centres provide free legal services to clients with a range of legal matters including employment matters. Overwhelmingly, our clients are poor or disadvantaged.

The recent "*Review of Commonwealth Community Legal Services Program*" by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, released in April 2008, confirmed that community legal centres are "providing services to clients who are significantly disadvantaged... 58% received some form of income support, 82% of clients earned less than \$26,000 per annum..." (page 6).

In general, the clients that community legal centres represent will not be able to effectively self-represent in proceedings before Fair Work Australia. Requiring our clients to self represent is likely to place them at significant comparative disadvantage to employer parties.

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Accordingly, it is entirely appropriate from both a fairness and efficiency point of view, that community legal centres be exempt from the requirement to seek permission to represent a person before Fair Work Australia under section 596(1) of the Bill.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H de Kretser', written in a cursive style.

Hugh de Kretser
Executive Officer