

## Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

### BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 JUNE 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Department of Human Services

**Topic:** Department Dispute Resolution

**Question reference number:** HS 64

**Senator:** Ludwig

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 24 July 2015

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

- a) How are disputes between departmental and/or agency staff mediated?
- b) Are any outside firms contracted to assist with this process? If yes: please list them, please include:
  - i) The structure of payments made to each firm (e.g. retainers, fees for each consultation etc).
  - ii) Amount paid to each firm since the last budget.
  - iii) When the contract with the firm commenced.
  - iv) When the contract with the firm will expire.
  - v) Why the firm was selected to provide the service.
  - vi) Please provide a list of disputes referred to the firm, including a brief description of the dispute.
- c) How are code of conduct violations by departmental and/or agency staff mediated?
- d) Are any outside firms contracted to assist with this process? If yes: please list them, please include:
  - i) The structure of payments made to each firm (e.g. retainers, fees for each consultation etc).
  - ii) Amount paid to each firm since the last budget.
  - iii) When the contract with the firm commenced.
  - iv) When the contract with the firm will expire.
  - v) Why the firm was selected to provide the service.
  - vi) Please provide a list of disputes referred to the firm, including a brief description of the dispute.

#### **Answer:**

- a) Where disputes exist between employees in the workplace which they have been unable to resolve, a range of strategies are available to encourage the resolution of the dispute. These strategies include:
  - Informal intervention by more senior staff.

- Reminder of the availability of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselling services for support.
  - Involvement of specialist human resources staff to resolve the dispute.
  - Rarely, engagement of a professional mediator to mediate the dispute.
- b) Rarely, an external professional mediator may be engaged to mediate a dispute between employees in the workplace. However, as this is done on a case by case basis, and given the department's size and geographical dispersion, the collection of information needed to answer this question would require an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources, in that the information cannot be collated without substantial manual intervention.
- c) The Department of Human Services has specific procedures in place to address potential breaches of the APS Code of Conduct. These procedures involve formal investigation and imposition of appropriate sanctions, rather than less formal processes such as mediation.
- d) Not applicable.