

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO**

**Program: 1.4 Justice Services**

**Question No. AE17/144**

**Senator Pratt asked the following question at the hearing on 24 March 2017:**

1. The report observes that the \$15 million in cuts to legal aid commissions and an additional \$6 million in cuts to community legal centres in the 2014 Federal Budget are likely to impact the number of clients able to access free and subsidised legal services, which may in turn affect the number of client referrals from CLC's to family law services and vice versa.

- a) Is the Attorney-General aware of the impact of cuts to CLCs on referrals to family law services?
- b) How does the Government plan to ensure that people involved in family law disputes are referred to family law services, given that CLC cuts will mean that they will be unable to engage in referrals?
- c) Is the Attorney-General aware that when people encounter difficulties in security legal advice, support and representation, this will negatively impact their ability to reach an agreement on family law matters (property settlement or child care arrangements)?
- d) How does the Government intend to respond to the negative effect that cuts to CLCs will have on people's ability to reach an out-of-Court agreement on family law matters?
- e) In September 2015, the Government announced an additional funding commitment of \$100 million for family violence measures. Did the distribution of this funding affect the operation of family law services to assist women and children experiencing violence?

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

1.

a)-d) The Government recognises the important role of the legal assistance sector in providing access to justice to the most vulnerable Australians.

On 24 April 2017, the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC, the Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, announced the Turnbull Government will provide a further \$55.7 million over the next three years to community legal centres (\$39 million) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (\$16.7 million) as part of the 2017-18 Budget.

The community legal centre funding will prioritise front-line family law and family violence services. Community legal centres and their clients have consistently identified this as the area of greatest need. The Government has targeted violence against women and children as one of its highest priorities and this funding continues to deliver on that commitment.

e) The \$100 million Women's Safety Package was announced on 24 September 2015. It includes \$15 million over three years for legal assistance providers (11 community legal centres and two legal aid commissions) to establish 12 domestic violence units and support five health justice partnerships. The domestic violence units deliver expert legal advice and assistance,

including in family law and child protection matters, to help women and children experiencing violence. Through the health justice partnerships, doctors and health staff are trained to identify signs of domestic violence and to support women to access on-site legal help. The work of the domestic violence units and health justice partnerships is also intended to assist women to access a range of other services including family law services.

In addition, on 28 October 2016, an additional \$30 million for legal assistance and family law services was allocated as part of a \$100 million package to implement the Third Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. This includes:

- \$4.9 million to extend funding for the twelve domestic violence units and five health justice partnerships funded under the Women's Safety Package for an additional year until 30 June 2019
- \$18.5 million for legal aid commissions to deliver integrated duty lawyer and social support services in family law courts
- \$6.2 million for family relationship centres to pilot enhanced models of legally assisted family dispute resolution for vulnerable families, and
- \$0.3 million for data analysis in the legal assistance sector to improve the evidence base around domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia.