From: Fiona McLeod <Fiona.McLeod@vic.alp.org.au>
Sent: Thursday, 25 April 2019 10:02 PM
To: comms
Subject: Re: Your pre-Federal Election legal help commitment for Melbourne's east

Dear Michael

When President of the Law Council and the Australian Bar Associarion before that, legal assistance funding was my number one priority. You may be familiar with the landmark report I commissioned and oversaw - the Justice Project www.justiceproject.com.au.

I crossed the country listening to the stories of people affected by the inability to access legal assistance and the difference such assistance can make to those in desperate need.

I was inspired to commission the Justice Project by the realisation, after years of advocating for legal assistance funding including submissions to the Productivity Commission, that telling people's stories can make a difference.

I am committed to secure sufficient resource into CLCs, specialist Dv and ATSILS funding and restoring the commonwealth legal aid funding to 50%, levels we have not seen for twenty years.

I was a regular commentator and supporter of CLCs including your excellent service. We worked together to secure the restoration of $40M cut by the Abbott government from CLCs.

I wish you all and your team all the .best

Kind regards,

Fiona McLeod SC
Labor Candidate for Higgins

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Fiona McLeod SC
Labor Candidate for Higgins

From: comms <comms@eclc.org.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 24 April 2019 11:03:02 AM

To: Fiona McLeod
Cc: Michael Smith
Subject: Your pre-Federal Election legal help commitment for Melbourne's east

Ms Fiona McLeod
Labor Candidate for Higgins

By email: fiona.mcleod@vic.alp.org.au

Dear Ms McLeod,

Your pre-Federal Election legal help commitment for Melbourne's east

The legal assistance provided by Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) are essential services like health care and housing. However, unlike health care and housing services, there is no ongoing safety net for people who are experiencing discrimination or disadvantage and who need legal help at the time they need it most

ECLC provides free legal help on a range of matters (family law, family violence and intervention orders, criminal law, motor vehicle accidents, debt and civil matters) to people from communities across Melbourne's eastern suburbs. It also improves community access to the legal system through education, development and partnership initiatives.

The Centre is keen to understand how you will ensure people in your electorate get the legal help they need when they need it most.

ECLC requests your response to the questions below by Thursday 2 May 2019. ECLC will publish your response on its website and in its May e-newsletter so that people and communities in its area can consider your response as they prepare to vote.

Responses will also be highlighted at ECLC's Volunteers and Partnerships Dinner on May 18. You are very welcome to attend the dinner, the Centre's major annual event.

Access to legal help in the electorate of Higgins
With a population of more than 920,000 in its catchment area, ECLC responds to a very large population, approximately 15% of the State's total. In 2018-19, ECLC delivered its essential legal services to approximately 2,700 community members, while carefully prioritising those most in need, with an operating budget of less than $3 million. About three times that number sought help from the Centre.

Successive reports have highlighted the rising demand for community legal centre services and the recommended additional funding, including the Productivity Commission ($120 million pa of federal funding) and the Justice Project ($390 million).

1. **What commitments will you make to increase resources for legal help in the Eastern region and in your electorate of Higgins?**
2. **What commitments, plans and proposals do you have to improve access to justice?**

Prevention, early intervention and response to family violence
Regrettably, ECLC assists a huge number of people each year who are experiencing family violence. As well as providing significant legal help to people in these awful situations, the Centre is actively working across prevention, early intervention and responses to family violence. This includes an Intervention Order Support Service four days each week at Ringwood Magistrates' Court, key specialist programs and extensive support through the legal and support teams. No one, especially women and children, should be unsafe within their own homes.

While the Victorian Royal Commission provided a strong 'roadmap' for strategic action, at the national level there has been a very limited response without a comprehensive plan and commensurate resources.

3. **What commitments including funding commitments will you make to addressing family violence across Australia?**

4. **What commitments will you make to ensure that legal help is fully integrated into these reforms?**

Elder abuse

ECLC has been actively working to prevent and respond to the emerging and tragic issue of elder abuse within the community for over ten years, where vulnerable older people experience harm carried out by someone they know and trust such as a family member or friend. This is an issue of great concern for agencies and seniors and ECLC has been active across prevention, education and response strategies in the, health, legal and community sectors, as well as with seniors groups themselves, including culturally diverse groups. ECLC has been pleased that a National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians has been developed, but this is a limited first step for a broad and challenging issue.

5. **What commitments, plans and proposals do you have to prevent and respond to elder abuse?**

Financial services/credit and debt/consumer law (and the Banking Royal Commission)

In response to the evidence uncovered by the Banking Royal Commission and growing demand, there is a need for substantial additional investment in consumer financial legal advice and assistance services. The Royal Commission's report explicitly acknowledged the valuable work of the legal assistance sector and the need for predictable funding.

Boosting financial counselling and community legal services, through a levy on industry in addition to existing Government funding, is an effective and fair way to ensure people can access help to assert their rights, get out of debt, and protect their livelihoods. As part of this, community legal centres need $26 million for an additional 200 community financial service lawyers located in both specialist community legal centres across Australia. This would increase the number of people that could be helped each year with these issues from 30,000 to 180,000.

6. **Will you commit to increasing the number of financial counsellors and community legal centre financial services lawyers? How?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services

In the Federal Budget 2019-20 announcement, the government has committed to the creation of a Single National Mechanism for Commonwealth Legal Assistance, which will be a unified administrative mechanism that provides guaranteed and quarantined funding to Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) via the states and territories.

ECLC is concerned about the decision that ATSILS funding will be included in a single mechanism. This is counter to the recent review of ATSILS released by the Attorney-General in late March 2019 and potentially the independence, self-determination and community control of ATSILS. This decision must be reversed.

7. **Will you commit retaining the independence of the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program (ILAP) to ensure both funding transparency and a commitment to Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations delivering these services?**

ECLC respectfully invites your response outlining the actions that you will take to address the issues raised in this letter by Thursday 2 May 2019.

It will publish your response on its website and in its May e-newsletter so that people and communities in its catchment area can consider these responses as they prepare to vote.

If you have any questions or would like to speak or meet with us, we would be very happy to do so.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Michael B. Smith

Chief Executive Officer
Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC)

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eastern community legal centre

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Human Rights - Fairness - Justice

ECLC acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land across ECLC's region. We pay our deep respects to the Elders, both past and present.

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