

13 June 2016

Mr Michael Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Eastern Community Legal Centre
Suite 3, Town Hall Hub
27 Bank Street
BOX HILL Vic 3128

Dear Mr Smith,

Thank you for your correspondence regarding Labor's plan to improve access to justice.

Labor acknowledges the vital work that the staff and volunteers of the Eastern Community Legal Centre do in providing legal assistance and community education in Victoria.

1. ***Access to legal help in the Yarra Ranges***

Labor believes that access to justice is a fundamental right of all Australians.

A Shorten Labor Government will invest around \$43 million in funding over three years from 1 July 2017 to frontline legal services so that they can continue doing their vital work.

This will mean that the Eastern Community Legal Centre will receive \$450,000 over three years under a Shorten Labor Government.

2. ***What commitments will you make in response to these urgent legal assistance needs?***

In government, Labor delivered a boost of \$30 million over two years for Legal Aid Commissions.

The Liberals have cut \$24 million from Community Legal Centres, \$15 million from Legal Aid Commissions, and \$13 million from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

That tells you all you need to know about the difference in priorities between Labor and the Liberals.

Legal Aid funding is a joint arrangement with the States and Territories. If elected, Labor would work with the States and Territories to negotiate appropriate funding arrangements.

As discussed above, a Shorten Labor Government will invest around \$43 million in funding over three years from 1 July 2017 to frontline legal services.

Consistent with Labor's long-standing commitment to ensure access to justice for all Australians, Labor will ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) are able to carry out their vital role by committing approximately \$24 million to

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ATSILS over three years, including \$18.18 million to completely reverse the devastating funding shortfalls imposed by the Abbott-Turnbull Government.

3. ***How will you support ECLC and other services to meet the increasing demand for family violence help?***

One of the first policy announcements MADE by Bill Shorten as Leader of the Opposition was a commitment of over \$70 million to address family violence including an investment of almost \$50 million to frontline legal services.

As outlined below, a Shorten Labor Government will, within the first 100 days of forming Government, commission a National Crisis Summit that will include examining ways to better respond to the needs of survivors of family violence.

4. ***What commitments and responses are you making to the proposals of the Safety First in Family Law five-step plan?***

A Shorten Labor Government will, within the first 100 days of coming to Government, commission a National Crisis Summit that will specifically examine the range of ways to build capacity in this area including:

- Strengthening the way in which the legal system currently operates with respect to family violence, and any implications for legislative and administrative reform.
- Improving training arrangements for State and Federal magistrates and judges to better respond to and manage family law and family violence cases.
- Prioritising the safety of women and children in the court environment, including better court access and support facilities for families in the form of improved court security, child care and support for litigants navigating the system (through the courts and family mediation centres).
- Coordinating best practice approaches to the critical role performed by police in all jurisdictions in responding to family violence and providing immediate support for those affected.

A summit on family violence is required for the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to agree to urgently implement coordinated judicial and social services reform within their areas of responsibility to better deal with family violence and enable stakeholders, victims, survivors and their families to openly lay down the key policy challenges and priorities.

Labor has also made specific investments to increase capacity of legal services to ensure people experiencing family violence do not need to go to court alone including almost \$50 million for frontline legal services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service.

We will also invest \$15 million in Safe at Home grants to help people affected by family violence stay safe in their own home and \$8 million in perpetrator mapping to look at the interactions across family violence, law enforcement, justice, child protection and related systems to help identify opportunities to prevent violence through information sharing.

This package of over \$70 million in initial investments to address family violence was the first

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costed policy announcement made by Bill Shorten as Leader of the Opposition, highlighting how urgent and important this priority will be for a Shorten Labor Government.

Labor has also recently announced a commitment of \$65 million over six years to provide funding certainty to the organisations delivering the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022). This will ensure 1800 RESPECT, Our WATCH and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) can continue their critical work in responding to, preventing and understanding family violence.

This commitment will ensure that the funding goes directly to frontline services providers so those experiencing violence can speak directly to qualified professionals as quickly as possible.

Labor will continue to consider further reforms to build capacity in the family law system in consultation with the Courts, police, legal services and families.

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

Labor understands the challenges presented by an ageing population. One of those challenges is the tragic issue of elder abuse.

Labor agrees that this issue will require a range of strategies across many sectors to better respond to this increasing problem.

A Shorten Labor Government will appoint a Minister for Ageing and develop a National Strategy for an Ageing Australia. Labor believes that achieving an age-friendly Australia will require a whole-of-Government approach, under the direction of a dedicated Minister for Ageing.

6. ***What is your response to the Change the Record blueprint and proposals and what other policies do you have for addressing these issues?***

A Shorten Labor Government will deliver a nationally coordinated approach to close the gap in Indigenous incarceration and victimisation rates. These rates have reached crisis point.

Labor will apply leadership and innovation to address the justice gap through community driven and national strategies that empower communities to address the complex causes of incarceration and crime.

Labor's plan will include:

- the first meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) convened under a Shorten Labor Government will consider priorities for justice targets to be included under the Closing the Gap framework to build safer communities and address levels of Indigenous incarceration.
- Establish a Working Group of State, Territory and local government agencies, as well as key community organisations, to develop measurable targets that address rising incarceration rates and build safer communities.
- Establish three new launch sites in a major city, regional town and remote community that build on existing community-led initiatives to explore the role of justice reinvestment in preventing crime and reducing incarceration.

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- Resource a long-term study of the effectiveness of the justice reinvestment project currently underway in Bourke, New South Wales, to see what Australia can learn from this specific initiative.
- Through COAG Labor will establish a national coordinating body to build the evidence base, collect data and measure progress as the new targets are implemented, and to monitor the effectiveness of justice reinvestment in the Australian context.

As mentioned above, Labor will invest approximately \$24 million to ATSILS over three years, including \$18.18 million to completely reverse the devastating funding shortfalls imposed by the Abbott-Turnbull Government.

Further details of our policies can be read at www.alp.org.au and www.100positivepolicies.org.au

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss these important issues.

Yours sincerely,

ALP Information Services Unit



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