

Shaun Leane MP

MEMBER FOR EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Parliamentary Secretary to the Special Minister of State

Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure



Michael Smith
CEO
Eastern Community Legal Centre
3/27 Bank Street
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November 16, 2018

Dear Michael,

Plan for addressing access to justice needs

Thank you for your correspondence. As you know, both I and the Labor members in the Eastern Region are strong supporters and advocates for ECLC and the great work you do, along with the Andrews Labor Government.

We are proud of our record of increased resources and system reform over the last four years, while acknowledging there are further steps needed to support our communities.

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

Victorian Labor has spent the last three years in Government leading the discussion about better support for victims of crime, holding offenders to account, system resourcing, access to justice, support for the community legal sector and redress for victims of child sexual abuse. We have a proud record of achievement and acknowledge there is much more to be done.

When Labor came to Government in 2014, CLCs were on the brink of losing substantial funding from the Federal Government. The threat of cuts left CLCs with an uncertain future, and the clients who rely on their services were left in limbo. Only Labor will ensure the provision of free and low cost legal advice and services for those who are experiencing hardship or disadvantage.

The Andrews Labor Government has invested significant funding to legal assistance services through Victoria Legal Aid, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services (VALS) and CLCs to continue the essential work they do for our most disadvantaged Victorians. The Andrews Labor Government has also funded grants through the Victorian Legal Services Board, resourcing projects that support some of the most vulnerable people in our community, including people with disability, indigenous people, young people and victims of family violence.

We are pleased that ECLC has been a recipient of significant increased funds through Department of Justice Grants, VLA and the Legal Services Board to support its vital work, particularly for its family violence and court work, the Yarra Ranges and including the new Monbulk Outreach service.

Victorian Labor has a long, proud history of investing in the community legal sector and will continue to fight for every Victorian's right to access affordable justice. Labor will:

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- continue to ensure adequate funding for Victoria Legal Aid community legal centres, and Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services and that the Federal Government pays its fair share;
- monitor funding for VALS and CLCs to ensure those most in need receive representation in the justice system;
- engage with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal Legal Services to design and deliver justice programs that will help address Aboriginal Victorians overrepresentation in the criminal justice system including primary prevention and diversion and
- review the demands on and processes of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to ensure it remains a quick, low cost and user-friendly alternative to the courts.

Labor will continue to support and where possible expand specialist courts, court lists and programs which lead to a reduction in reoffending and reduced costs for the taxpayer. Labor has a range of commitments including we will :

- continue supporting court diversion programs, specialist courts and lists;
- continue the roll out of the Koori Court model;
- increase the number of Judges and Magistrates in line with case load guidelines; and
- increase support for legal assistance, duty lawyers and other legal caseworkers to alleviate pressure on the system

3. What commitments will you make to ensure this vital work in the Yarra Ranges continues?

See above.

4. What commitments including funding commitments will you make to the full implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence's recommendations?

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

Family violence is the number one law and order issue in Victoria. The Andrews Labor Government has made an historic commitment to addressing family violence and to helping ensure that victims of family violence are supported.

The Andrews Labor Government established Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence and has committed to implementing all 227 report recommendations.

The Andrews Labor Government has provided unprecedented funding for family violence services, an investment that will help to save lives by responding to the needs of victims including children, and holding perpetrators to account.

The Andrews Labor Government has also responded with legislation to increase protections for children subject to family violence, make service of Family Violence Intervention Orders more straightforward and make it harder to abuse the intervention order appeal process. Labor will:

- support Family Safety Victoria, the state-wide agency responsible for implementing the Family Violence Royal Commission;
- support Respect Victoria, the state-wide prevention of violence agency to coordinate and deliver state wide prevention of family violence campaigns;
- aid victims of family violence to escape from these situations and build new lives free from abuse, through practical and therapeutic support, by providing culturally appropriate refuges or ensuring they can remain safe in their own home;
- ensure victims of family violence have access to legal help they need;
- support those affected by family violence to participate in the criminal justice system;
- develop initiatives aimed at increasing the economic participation and therefore the economic independence, of victim survivors;
- support the skills development, growth and recruitment of the family violence workforce;
- oversee programs to prevent family violence including in rural and regional areas;

- develop programs in conjunction with communities most affected by family violence such as the disabled and indigenous aimed at early intervention, eradication and prevention;
- commission research to ensure Victoria is a world leader in the prevention of family violence;
- develop culturally appropriate perpetrator behaviour change programs and ensure culturally appropriate refuges are available for victims;
- research the development of a Family Violence Index to monitor and report to parliament on the prevention of family violence; and
- implement all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family violence by 2023 and the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy by 2021.

Elder abuse

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

Older Victorians have received respect and dignity from investments by the Andrews Labor Government.

The Labor Government has invested \$6 million to tackle elder abuse by extending the trial of an integrated model of care – offering specialist clinical advice, family counselling and mediation services.

These services are being rolled out to five pilot locations. The funding package will also provide better workforce training to ensure staff can better identify and respond to cases of suspected elder abuse, and prevent the abuse from escalating.

Ten elder abuse prevention networks have also been funded, including the one led by ECLC.

Community awareness events are also being held to increase the understanding of elder abuse as a form of family violence.

7. What commitments will you make to support the development and growth of health-justice partnerships?

8. How would your government work across departments to break down ‘funding silos’ to support programs that work?

The Andrews Labor Government supports integrated service models and Health Justice Partnerships. We have recently funded the MABELS program, a highly effective HJP in the Eastern Region.

To further enhance our legal system’s accessibility, the Andrews Labor Government has conducted a wide-ranging review into Access to Justice, delivering major new investments in access to legal assistance, online legal information, duty lawyers, telephone advice services, translators and interpreters.

Labor will:

- strengthen the viability of CLCs by providing greater encouragement for lawyers to work in the community sector;
- engage the whole Victorian legal sector in our law reform process while we work to modernise our laws and the legal system and provide greater access to justice; and
- continue to deliver on the review’s wide-ranging recommendations to improve access to justice for vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians, including:
 - additional support for legal assistance with priority for duty lawyers services;
 - family violence-related services;
 - Aboriginal legal services and integrated service provision partnerships; and
 - support moving to four-year agreements with community legal centres.

Warm regards,

Shaun Leane MLC