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Law Council Supports Calls for Improvements to Access to Justice

The Law Council has backed the findings of a Senate Committee report which reveals that legal service providers, such as legal aid commissions, are not sufficiently providing Australian citizens with access to justice.

Law Council President John Corcoran said, "The committee has presented a damning report on the current funding levels provided to legal assistance service providers."

"This situation must be urgently addressed by the Commonwealth Government to ensure the best interests of children and socially disadvantaged members of the community," Mr Corcoran said.

In its report released today, the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee unanimously recommended that the federal, state and territory governments review existing funding arrangements for legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Indigenous legal services.

"Low income earners who are denied legal assistance due to the shortage of legal aid funding are forced to go elsewhere to try to obtain help, or to conduct their own cases without legal representation, or to simply give up," Mr Corcoran said.

"People are increasingly being forced to represent themselves in difficult family law matters or to live with a criminal record that may be undeserved. This can lead to loss of employment opportunities and poor housing as well as increased costs to the community at large through a greater demand for health and social security payments," he said.

"The committee points out that the legal system is currently afloat, due to a considerable amount of goodwill (from the legal profession), which could evaporate at any time – and the Law Council wholeheartedly agrees with this concern."

"The Law Council is looking forward to the Government addressing this crucial issue by way of a long overdue injection of funds for access to justice in the next Federal Budget," Mr Corcoran concluded.

Media Contact:

Elenore Eriksson, Director Public Affairs
P. 02 6246 3716 || M. 0419 269 855

www.lawcouncil.asn.au

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