

LEGAL AID MATTERS

BE AFRAID WITHOUT LEGAL AID

PETITION

To all Members of the Australian Parliament,

I believe that legal aid is in crisis and justice is being denied.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts by successive federal governments has pushed legal aid to the brink of collapse.

Today, many people living below the poverty line are *too wealthy* to qualify for legal aid.

Each day Australians end up representing themselves in court against powerful and expensive legal teams, or worse ignoring their legal problems, with devastating results.

It isn't just Australia's most disadvantaged missing out. Many are middle-class Australians, people who are not wealthy and cannot afford to pay for legal representation.

They are women trying to escape domestic violence, average workers who unfairly lose their job or young men and women who are facing the prospect of prison.

Infuriatingly, funding legal aid properly would actually save money. That's according to the Productivity Commission, which has recommended an immediate \$200 million injection to address only one part of the problem.

As it stands, Australia spends less on legal aid than most comparable legal systems. For example, the UK spends double the amount per capita on legal aid than we do.

I am calling on the next Federal Government to reverse the damage and put an end to this crisis now.

This can be done by:

- Increasing the Commonwealth's share of Legal Aid Commission funding to 50 per cent with the States and Territories. This would amount to an additional \$126 million.
- Immediately providing \$120 million to cover civil legal assistance, with the States and Territories contributing \$80 million, for a total of \$200 million – as recommended by the Productivity Commission.
- Immediately reverse the 2014 Commonwealth funding cuts to Community Legal Centres (\$12.1 million), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (\$4.5 million) to take effect from July 2017.

Legal aid goes to the heart of our notion of fairness and what kind of society we want to be. Is it one in which everyone has access to justice, or only those who can afford a lawyer?

I believe that legal aid matters.



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