

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Senate Inquiry into the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011

Written Question on Notice No. 2

Senator Siewert asked the following question at the hearing on 8 September 2011:

Access to advice and assistance and information for people experiencing problems

At the public hearings, there was some discussion about the resources available to assist DSP claimants to appeal a negative payment decision / rejection by Centrelink, and the capacity of individuals to obtain assistance.

- a. What financial assistance does the Federal Government offer to members of the National Welfare Rights Network to assist people seeking assistance to appeal a decision by Centrelink?
- b. How many Welfare Rights workers does this fund in each location across Australia, and where they are situated?
- c. Has the Government considered increasing funding for community organisations such as the National Welfare Rights Network, to enable them to meet the expected increase in demand for assistance with appeals that will arise from the changes to the DSP?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a. The Attorney-General's Department administers the Commonwealth Community Legal Services Program (CCLSP). The CCLSP is a dedicated program which supports and funds community legal services as part of the Commonwealth's contribution to the maintenance of effective systems of justice and legal assistance. The Commonwealth funds generalist and specialist services under the Program, and welfare rights is one of the specialist services. In 2011-12, the CCLSP will provide \$31.6 million to 138 community legal centres across Australia.
- b. The National Welfare Rights Network is a national peak body consisting of 14 community legal centres, specialising in Social Security law and policy. All 14 members of the National Welfare Rights Network receive recurrent funding under the CCLSP for welfare rights services. In 2011-12, \$1.8 million will be provided to these centres. CCLSP funding supports the delivery of legal assistance services but does not fund individual worker positions as such. The table at **Attachment A** details the location of the 14 community legal centres and their 2011-12 funding allocations. In 2010-11, a one-off funding allocation of \$70,000 was also provided to the National Welfare Rights Network, to provide Centrelink clients with independent and confidential legal information and advice about the same sex reforms.
- c. At this stage, no consideration has been given to the possibility of additional funding for the National Welfare Rights Network to deal with any increase in demand for assistance with appeals that may arise from the changes to the DSP. This is a matter that would need to be considered in the Budget context, taking account of the many competing priorities for Government funding.

Attachment A

Community Legal Centre	State	2011-12 CCLSP Welfare Rights Funding
Illawarra Legal Centre	NSW	\$92,724
Welfare Rights Centre	NSW	\$231,199
Barwon Community Legal Service	Victoria	\$97,505
Welfare Rights Unit	Victoria	\$193,623
Townsville Community Legal Service	Queensland	\$70,203
Welfare Rights Centre, Brisbane	Queensland	\$182,046
Welfare Rights Centre (SA)	SA	\$194,010
Freemantle Community Legal Centre	WA	\$61,371
Sussex St. Community Law Service	WA	\$61,371
Welfare Rights & Advocacy Service	WA	\$195,119
Hobart Community Legal Service	Tasmania	\$61,364
Launceston Community Legal Service	Tasmania	\$62,236
Darwin Community Legal Service	NT	\$61,872
Canberra Welfare Rights and Legal Centre	ACT	\$243,809