

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Group: 2

Program: 1.3

Question No. SBE14/166

Senator Wright asked the following written question from the 20 November and 11 December 2014 hearings.

1. Under the Government's cuts to the funding for the legal assistance sector, the Women's Legal Centre in the ACT will lose \$50,000 in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – this is the equivalent of one solicitor working 45 hours a fortnight for a year. The Centre has calculated that in the last year, this solicitor has undertaken 535 advice activities, approximately 600 hours of casework/representation and supervised another 600 hours of advice and casework by pro-bono lawyers. As such, over two years they calculate they would lose 2270 hours of legal work and have calculated the cost of this work if done in the private sector as \$1.2 million.
 - a) Is this consistent with your understanding of what these cuts will mean?
 - b) Do you accept that cuts of \$50,000 will be impossible for already stretched legal services to absorb without cutting services?
2. The Law Council of Australia has stated that actuarial modeling from Price Waterhouse Coopers shows that for every dollar invested in legal aid, there is a saving of \$1.60 to \$2.25 in the delivery of justice. With this in mind, why does the Government continue to make cuts to frontline legal services that are already delivering very strong value for money for the tax payer?
3. Does the Government have plans to withdraw further funding from already chronically underfunded legal services, such as Indigenous legal services in the Northern Territory or elsewhere?

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

1. Funding allocations for individual community legal centres from 1 July 2015 are yet to be determined. It is therefore not possible, at this stage, to identify the impact on any particular community legal centre of the 2013 MYEFO legal assistance savings measure.
2. The 2013 MYEFO legal assistance savings measure was targeted at legal policy reform and advocacy activities, not front-line service delivery.
3. Funding allocations for legal assistance programmes from 1 July 2015 will be determined as part of the 2015-16 Budget process.