



MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 30 June 2014 – for immediate release

Brandis restrictions starting tomorrow seek to silence community legal centres speaking out on unfair laws, policies and practices

National access to justice campaign Community Law Australia has rejected as damaging and counter-productive new restrictions on the law reform and policy advocacy work of Federally funded community legal centres that will come into force tomorrow.

“These restrictions will stand in the way of fixing serious legal problems for many disadvantaged people and should be abandoned before they begin,” said Carolyn Bond AO, national spokesperson, today.

“The Federal Government should recognise the value and efficiency of community legal centres putting forward their views on how laws, policies and practices can be improved or better enforced to deliver just outcomes. They do so based on the experience of seeing thousands of people every year,” Ms Bond said.

The restrictions are being driven by Federal Attorney-General George Brandis, who wants centres to focus exclusively on “frontline services”, a position starkly at odds not only with the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into access to justice arrangements, but with views recently expressed by social services minister Kevin Andrews in response to gag fears in the welfare sector.

“While law reform and policy advocacy are a small part of community legal centre work, they are a vital part.

“Community legal centres can’t be silent on law reform to protect women and children from family violence. They can’t be silent on advocating better policies to protect people from predatory money lenders and mortgage brokers. They can’t be silent when speaking out can mean thousands of legal problems could be prevented before they become individual cases of people walking through the already-crowded doors of community legal centres.

“The Federal Government shouldn’t expect silence from community legal centres facing a flawed and unjust legal system where unfair laws left in place unchallenged will inevitably fuel the crisis levels of demand for free legal assistance in Australia,” Ms Bond said.

The restrictions on law reform and policy advocacy follow deep cuts to community legal centres through MYEFO and the recent Federal Budget. One-off grants to a small number of community legal centres announced last week were welcome, but heavily outweighed by the overall cuts, Ms Bond noted.

The Attorney-General claims community legal centres will still be able to engage in law reform and policy advocacy, but not with Federal funds. Ms Bond said this failed to acknowledge the significant unfunded contribution community legal centres already make across a range of areas.

“The Federal Government should also know that by further cutting funds to an already chronically underfunded sector, they are directly impacting vital frontline services,” Ms Bond said.

She called on the Federal Government to affirm its support for law reform and policy advocacy, even where calls for necessary change sometimes questioned existing government policies.

Further information

[Last chance for law services to be heard, fighting to protect the most vulnerable](#)

[Advocacy and frontline services vital to achieve access to justice](#)

[Federal budget cuts to community legal centres in the news](#)

To arrange an interview

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