

The Hon Brad Hazzard MP
Attorney General, NSW

The Hon Martin Pakula MP
Attorney General, Victoria

The Hon Michael Mischin MLC
Attorney General, Western Australia

The Hon John Rau MP
Attorney General, South Australia

The Hon Dr Vanessa Goodwin MLC
Attorney General, Tasmania

Mr Simon Corbell MLA
Attorney General, Australian Capital Territory

The Hon Yvette D'Ath MP
Attorney General, Queensland

The Hon John Elferink MLA
Attorney General, Northern Territory

OM15/741

5 March 2015

Senator The Hon. George Brandis QC
Commonwealth Attorney General and Minister for Arts
PO Box 6100
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Brandis,

The crisis in legal assistance funding has reached such a level that we, the undersigned Attorneys General, need to take this step to urge you to reconsider current proposals for the new national funding agreement.

We are united in our concern about proposed cuts in funding to Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres, the Aboriginal Legal Services, as well as a range of changes to administrative arrangements.

The proposed agreement will represent a cost shift to states and territories which we cannot accept and cannot bear.

At a time when an independent review by the Productivity Commission has called for increased funding, putting the indisputable case as to why this would ultimately lead to savings to taxpayers, the Commonwealth is taking the unacceptable step of instituting further cuts to a sector that has already seen significant reductions in funding.

These proposals will affect the most vulnerable members in our community, including foremost women and children who are victims of or at risk of family violence, as well as Indigenous Australians. It is difficult to reconcile these actions with the Prime Minister's recent recognition of the importance of tackling domestic and family violence and closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian as national issues. Cutting funding to the services which help these vulnerable members of our community, at this time, is short sighted and ill conceived. Such a move will further set us back decades in tackling this important issue.

We seek commitment from you on the following matters:

1. That states and territories be provided with proposed funding allocations no later than **31 March 2015**;
2. That there be no further funding cuts to Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres, and the Aboriginal Legal Service;

Please note a change of address:

C/- Level 19, 52 Martin Place, Sydney NSW 2000

Mail should be sent to:

GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001

Phone: (61 2) 8574 6000 Fax: (61 2) 9339 5506 Email: office@hazzard.minister.nsw.gov.au

3. That future funding be adjusted to account for indexation as well as increase in population;
4. That the Commonwealth continues to negotiate with states and territories on future funding arrangements in good faith.

If the Commonwealth is not prepared to make this commitment, states and territories will not be in a position to agree to the legal assistance reforms proposed by the Commonwealth.

Yours faithfully,

Brad Hazzard *[Signature]*

[Signature]

Varene Grant

Yvonne D'Almeida

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]