



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Community Legal Centres

SPEECH

Tuesday, 7 February 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Thistlethwaite, Matt, MP

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Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (16:24): Across Australia, community legal centres provide support every day to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people facing what is often one of life's most difficult legal challenges and significant crises in their life, be it domestic violence, tenancy disputes, debt, consumer problems or employment issues. Community legal centres offer assistance to people who are without the means to obtain private legal advice.

In 2014-15, CLCs across the country assisted over 216,000 clients with advice and casework services, provided over \$250,000 referrals and responded to around 190,000 requests for legal information from the public. Of the many people they assisted, 50 per cent of their clients received social welfare, 25 per cent had a disability and 13 per cent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We are talking about some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community.

In the area that I represent at Kingsford Smith, we have an outstanding Community Legal Centre in the Kingsford Legal Centre which is located at the University of New South Wales. A wonderful local team there, led by Anna Cody, recently celebrated their 25th anniversary. I want to congratulate Anna, who in 2016 was awarded the 2016 Human Rights Law Award for her work over the last many, many years with Community Legal Centres. Because of this good work at the Kingsford CLC—which deserves support—Labor announced in the lead-up to the recent election that we would provide an additional \$43 million in frontline legal services working to help people, in particular those suffering from incidences of domestic violence.

Community Legal Centres have long been valued for their outstanding work. DV survivor and Australian of the Year Rosie Batty has personally praised legal centres for this work. But, unfortunately, in stark contrast to what Labor proposed at the last election, the Liberals have done nothing but attack Community Legal Centres and the services they provide, cutting \$52 million from CLCs, legal aid commissions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. As a result of the Turnbull government's failure to recognise the important work of these centres, CLCs face a 30 per cent funding cut in June this year. For Kingsford Legal Centre, this will mean that of their five solicitors they will have to cut one of them. They will have to cut many of their outreach services and have a dramatic reduction in the services they provide. This is unfair and unconscionable, and will affect some of the most vulnerable people in our community. These impacts will be felt Australia wide. I call on the government to reverse these heartless cuts to CLCs. *(Time expired)*