



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Community Legal Centres, Domestic Violence

SPEECH

Thursday, 26 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Mitchell, Rob, MP	Question No.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (12:20): I rise to air my disgust at the Liberal government for turning its back on vulnerable people in the electorate of McEwen, especially those who are suffering from domestic violence, who are predominantly women. Sadly, I would like to start by bringing to the attention of the chamber some of the key statistics. As White Ribbon tell us, one woman is murdered by her current or former partner every week. Family violence is the leading contributor to death and disability in Australian women aged under 45. Seventy five per cent of assaults against women happen at home.

The City of Whittlesea in my electorate has one of the highest rates of family violence in the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne, and that increased by 35 per cent in the last two years. Over the past 14 years, there has been an increase of 268 per cent compared by 172 per cent state-wide. Incidences of family violence increased last financial year to 2,359 and 60 per cent of all assaults recorded by police arose from family violence. In 55 per cent of cases, victims had their first contact with a support agency. Thirty nine per cent of cases had contacted police and 41 per cent had applied for an intervention. Emotional and physical abuse were present in 72 per cent of all cases.

The City of Whittlesea ranks sixth in Australia on the socioeconomic index for disadvantage. It is also one of Australia's fast growing municipalities with high levels of mortgage stress. These statistics are deeply disturbing which is why it is inconceivable that this government has cut funding from the highly valued Whittlesea Community Legal Service. The community legal service are a free legal service for people living in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding areas, with a number of their cases directly relating to domestic violence. They help those who have suffered emotionally and physically at the hands of perpetrators nearest to them. They help those who need the help the most. This government slashed their funding.

I want to let this chamber know just how much it would cost to keep this important and, at times, life-saving service in operation. Overall, funding to the Whittlesea Community Legal Service is set to be hit by a reduction of approximately \$232,000, more than 30 per cent of its total community legal service funding over the next two years. The embattled Attorney-General has announced community legal sector funding cuts which have deep and lasting impacts on our communities. The government have cut the final two years of Commonwealth funding to boost generalist and family law services, which is \$120,000 per annum. They have cut funding for lawyers working with local Family Relationships centres, which assist separating couples with legal advice, casework and legal education which costs only \$59,000 per annum.

How dare those opposite say they are about 'good government' when they are callously taking away the only support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities have. I have written to the Attorney-General urging him to consider a funding request from the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre, which services many constitutes in the northern region of McEwen. The funding request from the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre is \$207,000. That is enough for them to keep their services going beyond 1 July 2015. All the government can say is, 'We're not going to discuss funding until after the May budget.'

Effectively, community legal centres have been left in limbo and they will remain that way until the government makes a decision at the end of May. Again, many members of our community rely on the centre's support and resources in their darkest times, including when fleeing family violence and seeking support for separating families. What are these families going to do after 1 July this year? The cruel cuts by this government mean families and individuals suffering family breakdowns and domestic abuse will no longer have anywhere local to go. It goes to the personal values and priorities of this government. It can find \$3.5 million to fund a law expert in a witch-hunt but not \$500,000 for community legal centres that actually make a difference.

There is a silver lining: the Andrews' Labor government in Victoria. I commend Daniel Andrews for establishing a royal commission into family violence. Again, the differentiation of Labor values versus Liberal values is clear. Whilst Labor has royal commissions into domestic violence and into systematic abuse against children, those

opposite spend \$57 million on a witch hunt into trade unions—that achieved nothing. These are the values that separate us. Labor is all about putting people first; that is what Labor governments do. And good government is about looking after our people and our communities, but that is not what the Abbott government are doing. It is time the Abbott government changed their twisted priorities and focused on Australia, not on themselves.