
Wednesday, 28 November 2007

MORE LEGAL AID

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson announced today that the Legal Services Commission would receive an extra \$1.8 million this financial year to assist with immediate cost pressures on the organisation that provides legal aid in South Australia.

Mr Atkinson says he has been aware for some months that the Commission was under financial pressure and asked the Attorney-General's Department to investigate.

The main reasons for the financial over-runs were identified as:

- An increase in activity because more people applied for legal aid;
- Higher fees charged by private practitioners;
- Increasing the range of services to country areas; and
- Under-funding by the Commonwealth government of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement.

“It would appear that all of these factors combined at one time to place the Commission under financial pressure, so, when I put the case forward to the Treasurer, he was sympathetic to the Commission's plight,” Mr Atkinson says.

“The extra money is an increase of 15% over what was originally allocated in the 2007-08 budget.

“Clearly some of these pressures are continuing and work will continue to raise the Commission's needs with the Treasurer in the 2008-09 State budget process.

“I am keen to ensure that the Commission is provided with sufficient funds to ensure that it can continue its valuable work in the criminal-justice system,” he says.

The Commission will also receive extra recurrent funds from next year as part of the program to tackle the criminal activities of the bikie gangs.

The Legal Services Commission is funded by both the State and Commonwealth governments to increase access to legal services for those people who cannot afford to pay for private legal representation.

The State Government contribution for 2007-08 has now increased to \$13.545 million as a result of this extra money for this financial year.