



## **Deaths In Custody Watch Committee (WA) Inc**

### **More People Will Die Unless Legal Services are Properly Resourced**

The Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA is seriously concerned that the cuts to the community legal assistance sector will mean more people die.

Currently in WA, you are only guaranteed a lawyer if you have serious criminal charges. This means people who are charged with other criminal offences are left to self-represent, clogging up the court system, and people are going to prison for crimes they otherwise would not, should they have had representation.

The situation is worse the further you go from the Perth metro area. Many regional and remote towns do not have any lawyers, and where there are lawyers some have waitlists of up to 5 weeks.

And if you're a victim of domestic violence and you need legal help to leave your abusive partner, you're unlikely to get into a refuge, let alone get a lawyer to help you keep you and your children safe.

And if you're an Aboriginal person you could be forgiven for thinking that your life doesn't matter, we seem to have forgotten the case of Andrea Pickett who was murdered by her partner after state systems failed her, and have we already forgotten Ms Dhu, a victim of violence, locked up for fines?

Community Legal Centres and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services assist people like, Ms Pickett and Ms Dhu everyday to flee violent perpetrators, and assist with many other issues like outstanding fines.

Lawyers are rallying across the country – this only happens when there is a serious crisis. Community lawyers recognise that when legal problems are not resolved there is a greater cost to society, for instance in health systems and in child protection. When people cannot escape violence, lose their children, their jobs and are desperate, people do desperate things, leading to crimes being committed. Without lawyers to intervene at early stages more people will end up in prison.

The Federal Government have announced a national commitment to ending violence against women but at the same time the government is cutting back legal support to the community, which includes women fleeing domestic violence and abuse. How can the government justify making victims further vulnerable in this way?

We call on the Government to recognise that the legal system is in crisis and the only way to prevent more people from dying is to truly show a commitment to addressing family and domestic violence by adequately funding community legal assistance service providers.

For comment please contact:

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