

Item 3.3

Support for Community Legal Centres

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

On 19 February 2024, Council unanimously resolved to support my Lord Mayoral Minute, [Progressing Action on Safety for Our LGBTIQ+ Communities](#), which requested the Chief Executive Officer to investigate funding for local community legal centres that support members of the LGBTIQ+ communities seeking redress for acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment or abuse against them. The outcome of that investigation will be reported to Council next month.

This was one of several actions Council supported following the LGBTIQ+ Safety Summit I hosted in partnership with ACON on 9 February 2024, which were set out in my Lord Mayoral Minute.

The Managing Principal Solicitor of the Inner City Legal Centre wrote to me supporting the Minute's recommendations relating to legal centres.

The letter explained that the Inner City Legal Centre provides the only LGBTIQ+ specific legal service in NSW. This includes the only Trans and Gender Diverse Legal Service, the only Sex Worker specific Legal Service and the only LGBTIQ+ specific domestic violence legal service and safe room in all of NSW. Eight staff, including six lawyers augmented by the support of over 100 committed volunteers provide these and other vital services.

The Centre receives annual funding of less than \$1 million through the State and Commonwealth National Legal Assistance Partnership, much of which is allocated towards support for priority groups. These priority groups do not include the LGBTIQ+ communities and sex workers, which means the Inner City Legal Centre does not receive targeted funds to help these groups.

Sector in crisis

Community legal centres across Australia face serious funding constraints. On 24 March 2024, Community Legal Centres Australia released its Sector in Crisis Report based on a survey of 117 community legal centres.

According to the Guardian, they reported having to turn away more than 1,000 people every day in 2023 due to budget constraints and short staffing. This was twice the number they were able to help. A snapshot of the report is available [here](#).

The Sector in Crisis report forms part of Community Legal Centres Australia's submission to the federal budget seeking at least \$125 million in additional funding for all community legal centres for the 2024-25 financial year as well as ongoing funding into the future. The outcome of this submission will be known when the Treasurer hands down the Commonwealth budget in Parliament on 14 May 2024.

In November 2023, following my Lord Mayoral Minute, [Support for Waterloo South Relocations](#), Council unanimously resolved for the Chief Executive Officer to consult with local community organisations in the area, including Redfern Legal Centre and the Aboriginal Legal Service, about what support residents will require during relocations and advise them about the City's available grant programs. An outcome from that request will also be presented to Council in June 2024.

I have written to the Treasurer and Attorney-General of both the Federal and NSW Governments requesting additional funding for community legal centres in their 2024-2025 budgets.

In the letter to me, the Inner City Legal Centre acknowledges that funding core legal assistance services is not the role of local councils. However, the City remains committed to helping address this resourcing crisis and ensure our most vulnerable communities are not denied the legal support they need including women, children and gender diverse people escaping violence.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) following a Lord Mayoral Minute in November 2023, Council unanimously resolved for the Chief Executive Officer to consult with local community organisations in the area including Redfern Legal Centre about what support residents will require during relocations and advise them about the City's available grant programs. The outcomes of that request will be reported to Council in June 2024;
- (ii) following the LGBTIQ+ Safety Summit in February 2024, and in response to a Lord Mayoral Minute, Council unanimously resolved for the Chief Executive Officer to investigate funding for local community legal centres. The outcomes of that request will also be reported to Council in June 2024;
- (iii) on 19 March 2024, the Lord Mayor wrote to the NSW Treasurer and NSW Attorney General calling for increased funding to be included in the NSW State budget for Anti-Discrimination NSW and community legal centres; and
- (iv) on 24 March 2024, Community Legal Centres Australia released its Sector in Crisis Report stating that in 2022-23, inadequate funding and overwhelming demand for services and workforce challenges left community legal centres struggling to respond to community needs and they desperately require ongoing investment from the Federal and State Governments; and

- (B) Council endorse the City of Sydney's advocacy to the Federal and State Governments requesting urgent additional and ongoing funding and support for community legal centres.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor