

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

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SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

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NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Interim Report prepared by the NSW Legislative Council's Social Issues Committee on overcoming Indigenous disadvantage in NSW.

We note that the Combined Community Legal Centres Group (NSW) Inc. (CCLCG) made a submission to the inquiry, dated 12 February 2008, which addressed the issue of legal strategies for addressing sexual assault, family violence and child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities, which are all key factors contributing to the current lifetime expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in NSW.

We do not wish to repeat our submission here, but rather draw your attention to areas of our submission which have not addressed in the Interim Report.

We are pleased that the Interim Report highlights the issue of child sexual assault and, in particular, the need for funding to implement the recommendations of the *Breaking the Silence Report*. We are concerned that no new funding has been allocated to implement the report. We believe it is totally inadequate to expect agencies to implement the comprehensive recommendations in the *Breaking the Silence Report* without additional funding.

However, the Interim Report lacks detail with regards to impact of family violence on life expectancy. We note that "Issues for consideration 45" states, in part:

The Committee will examine reasons behind under-reporting of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Consideration will also be given to the level of government support for Aboriginal police officers and ACLOs. The Committee will examine the efficacy of early intervention programs targeted at male perpetrators.

While we encourage the Inquiry to examine those issues, we hope that the final report will also address, in detail, the full range of strategies available to prevent family violence, and the need for increased legal services and social services (including funding) to assist victims of family violence. The Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) has recently severely cut back its services in

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relation to Family Law and Care and Protection because of a failure by government to properly fund the service. It is imperative services such as the ALS are fully funded to support victims of family violence and abuse.

Furthermore, while the Interim Report acknowledges the issue of child sexual assault in some detail, the report is lacking in analysis of the impact of sexual assault on adult victims.

We are disappointed that the Interim Report does not refer to the *Criminal Justice Sexual Offences Taskforce Report (2005)* or the *NSW Ombudsman's Report "Domestic violence: improving police practice" (December 2006)*.

We draw your attention to the following recommendations made in the CCLCG submission of 12 February 2008 which we feel have not been adequately addressed in the Interim Report:

Recommendation 1

CCLCG calls on the NSW Government to implement all recommendations in the Criminal Justice Sexual Offences Taskforce Report (2005), including recommendations 7, 67 and 68 for further funding.

Recommendation 2

- a) Provide additional funding to legal services and other services that can assist in providing housing, counseling and other support services for domestic violence victims, particularly in terms of assisting women with specialist needs, including in rural regional and remote areas where there are large Aboriginal populations.
- b) Establish a Domestic Violence Homicide Review Team.
- c) Increase police training on responding to domestic violence cases.
- d) Improve the application processes and enforcement of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs).
- e) Implement with full funding the recommendations of the NSW Ombudsman's Report "Domestic violence: improving police practice" (December 2006).

Should you require any further information on any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact Sara Blazey, at sara.blazey@clc.net.au, or on 02 4782 4155.

We hope these comments are useful for your further deliberations on these matters.

Yours sincerely



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