

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

State budget marred by axing of vital employment rights service

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Victoria's only free specialist employment legal service, Jobwatch, is facing closure after today's State Budget confirmed its funding would end on 30 June. The vital community service assists around 11,000 Victorians each year.

'The decision to cut Jobwatch's funding mars a number of positive announcements in today's budget,' said Hugh de Kretser, Executive Officer of the Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres. 'Jobwatch performs a critical and unique role in helping Victorian workers. It ensures workers receive their proper pay and entitlements, it protects against unfair dismissal, it addresses discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment and promotes workplace health and safety. Jobwatch urgently needs an increase in funding to meet demand, not a cut in funding.'

JobWatch is a specialist community legal centre which provides free legal information, advice and representation to Victorian workers and undertakes community legal education and law reform work. Its telephone information service currently takes around 11,000 calls each year. 55% of callers are referred from Fair Work Australia and the Fair Work Ombudsman and the unmet demand for the service is around 65%. Around 90% of its clients are not union members. It currently receives \$871,000 in annual funding from the Department of Business and Innovation.

'The decision to cut Jobwatch's funding stands in contrast to a range of welcome initiatives in today's budget, and in particular \$9 million over four years to continue critical community legal services focused on assisting victims of family violence, the homeless and disadvantaged people in rural and regional Victoria,' said Mr de Kretser. 'The Federation also welcomes the continuation of the successful Court Integrated Services Program which helps cut reoffending, as well as initiatives in youth justice and child protection,' said Mr de Kretser.

In announcing the \$9 million funding for community legal services, Attorney General Robert Clark said 'Victoria's network of Community Legal Centres plays a vital role in our justice system, providing members of the public with advice, representation in court, and other legal assistance.'

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