

Media Release



Employment rights service facing closure due to Victorian Government funding cuts

19 April 2011

Victoria's only free specialist employment legal service, Jobwatch, has received notice that the Victorian Coalition Government intends to cut its funding. The vital community service, which assists around 11,000 Victorians each year, faces closure by 30 June 2011 unless ongoing funding can be secured.

A March 2011 letter from the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Richard Dalla-Riva, told Jobwatch "[i]t is my assessment that the activities for which the previous government provided funding are no longer clearly aligned to the objectives of my department". The letter strongly recommends that JobWatch seek alternative funding from Victoria Legal Aid, but Victoria Legal Aid has advised that it cannot fund Jobwatch without a funding grant from the Victorian Government. JobWatch currently receives \$871,000 per annum in Victorian Government funding.

'JobWatch has worked tirelessly for over 30 years to assist the most disadvantaged Victorian workers who have nowhere else to turn for help when their livelihoods are at stake' said Hugh de Kretser, Executive Officer of the Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres. 'The impact on workers would be severe if JobWatch was forced to close.'

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 presently 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%.

'Jobwatch performs a critical and unique role in protecting the rights of Victorian workers. It ensures workers receive their proper pay and entitlements, it protects workers from unfair dismissal, it addresses discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace and promotes workplace health and safety' said Mr de Kretser. 'Jobwatch urgently needs an increase in funding to meet demand, but instead, the Victorian Government is cutting its funding' said Mr de Kretser. 'This decision runs completely contrary to the Victorian Government's stated commitment to a just and fair Victoria.'

'The community legal sector, which is already chronically underfunded, will be heavily impacted if Jobwatch is forced to close, due to increased demands for assistance with complex employment issues that many community legal centres do not have the resources to assist with' said Mr de Kretser.

Further information:

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