



**Law  
Institute  
Victoria**

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### LEGAL AID FUNDING ELECTION PLEDGE WELCOME

The Law Institute today welcomed a Victorian Labor Party announcement that there would be further funding for legal aid if it won the State election.

The President of the Law Institute, David Faram, said the commitment for increased funding was the result of a long campaign fought this year by practitioners in city, suburban and regional areas of Victoria.

The announcement was made today by the Attorney-General, Rob Hulls, during an address at the Law Institute's President's lunch. The campaign for further funding has been the work of a legal aid taskforce made up of representatives from the Law Institute, the Bar Council and the Criminal Bar Association.

"This is an important victory for access to justice. It is not as much as we asked for but it is still a significant funding increase and most importantly, it is recurrent funding," he said.

"It is good to see that the Labor Party has finally stopped buck passing time and has taken notice."

Mr Faram said the Victorian Liberal Party had sent "mixed messages" on its policy related to legal aid and he called on the party to make a proper funding commitment.

Mr Faram said if the State Government was re-elected, there would be an increase in the level of fees paid to lawyers representing people in our courts which is presently totally inadequate. At present, the legal aid fee for a summary criminal case in a Magistrates' Court hearing is \$409 plus GST, which includes all preparation, court appearances and fees for both the solicitor and the barrister.

According to a survey by Victoria Legal Aid, 27 per cent of lawyers working in the Magistrates' Court jurisdiction refused to take any legal aid work. "This trend can't continue and we hope this funding boost will go some way to addressing that. For many, doing legal aid work simply isn't viable on the available fees," said Mr Faram.

"Many don't want to abandon doing the work but they have no choice. Most are now only doing it out of personal obligation. It is simply no way to run a justice system. The problem of lack of legal aid funding has been the making of successive Governments - both state and federal - who have failed to act. It is now up to them to fix the problem and ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are able to access justice in our courts."

***For media inquiries, contact the Institute's media adviser, Paul Conroy, on 9607.9373 or 0418.371099***