

## Media Release

Date: 10/06/2016

### Federal Labor commits to reversing cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd (ATSILS) welcomes the news announced today by the Australian Labor Party that should they win government, they would reverse the 24 million dollar cuts announced by the Federal Government due to begin on July 1 this year.

Shane Duffy, CEO of ATSILS said “In Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be imprisoned at an unacceptable rate and continue to be over represented in the child protection system. The ongoing erosion of funding for culturally responsive frontline legal services has been a significant contributing factor to this issue.”

“When the most vulnerable in the community don’t have access to justice or are unable to access adequate legal representation before the courts, they are more likely to end up in prison at far greater cost to the community and the tax payer. An economic value study by [The Law Council of Australia](#) showed that every dollar invested in legal assistance would result in an \$18 dollar saving downstream to the community.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constitute less than 4% of the state’s population however they account for nearly 30% of Queensland’s prison population and nearly 50% of the child protection system.

Mr. Duffy said, “This broken record of statistics obviously reflects the current need put on our services due to inadequate funding levels which in turn undermine our ability to come anywhere near meeting the growing demand.”

Shortsighted tough on crime approaches, coupled with the chronic underfunding of the legal assistance sector & ATSILS to the tune of 200 million dollars in figures released by the [Australian Productivity Commission](#), has been a recipe for disaster and has left Queensland grappling with a record prison population that is economically unsustainable.

“While we welcome this latest commitment by the Labor Party, we call on all parties to commit to the reversal of these cuts. Further, we encourage all parties to increase investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled legal services such as ATSILS and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, to better reflect need and the reality we are dealing with,” Mr Duffy said.

This call was echoed in yesterday’s landmark [“Redfern Statement”](#), where the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service in conjunction with a number of other peak bodies, and over 55 mainstream Non-Government Organisations including the Law Council of Australia and the Australian Medical Association, called for action in addressing Indigenous disadvantage based on improved relationships with government.

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