

## Media Release

Date: Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015

### Putting 'Smarts' back into the Queensland Justice System

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd (ATSILS) is encouraged by the announcement of the Palaszczuk Government's first state budget measures in the area of law, order and safety. We welcome the confirmation of \$32.3 million in funding for the reinstatement of the Murri court, Special Circumstances court and Drug court and the \$11.8 million allocated to Prisoner Reintegration Programs.

Shane Duffy, Chief Executive Officer of ATSILS said, "In the current climate where the state's justice system is grappling with a record prison population, the decision to reinstate effective alternatives to incarceration is a win for common sense and the most vulnerable members in the community."

"Diversionary courts like the Murri, Special Circumstances and the Drug courts are key examples of smarter approaches to justice that focus on rehabilitating offenders, reducing the rate of crime and creating considerable long-term cost savings for the community. "

When the previous government defunded these diversionary strategies in favour of more punitive policies, it was a devastating blow to the justice system and a false economy. Queensland's tough on crime policies have reduced judicial discretion and unprecedented numbers of people have ended up in prison at great expense to the taxpayer.

Mr Duffy said, "A significant factor in this continues to be the unacceptable rates at which our people are experiencing violence and being put in prison. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constitute less than 4% of the state population however they account for nearly 30% of the state's prison population. It has reached a crisis point."

"To tackle this crisis it is vital that culturally responsive alternatives to incarceration like the Murri Court are in place."

"Rebooting these diversionary programs signals positive intent by the government to improve lives by shifting much needed resources back into the community, however more needs to be done to change the record long term. Diversionary measures need to be underpinned with more coordinated investment in early intervention and prevention strategies to create the holistic approach to justice reinvestment we are advocating for. As the state's expanding prison costs become unsustainable, justice reinvestment presents a viable solution. This approach would see further resources directed away from prisons and into community initiatives designed to address the root causes of crime. The focus is to stop people coming in contact with the criminal justice system in the first place."

ATSILS calls on the government to extend their commitment to justice reform going forward and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and services to develop evidence based localised justice reinvestment solutions specific to the challenges we face in Queensland.

**Media Contact:** Joshua Herd [joshua.herd@atsils.org.au](mailto:joshua.herd@atsils.org.au)