



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Legal Aid funding a significant step in supporting greater equity

'The additional \$49.9 million to Victoria Legal Aid to provide legal representation to disadvantaged Victorians is a valuable step in supporting greater equity in Victoria,' said Cath Smith, Chief Executive Officer of VCOSS.

VCOSS spoke at yesterday morning's protest outside the County Court calling for increased legal aid funding to improve the dire state of legal aid in Victoria, together with former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alastair Nicholson, Caroline Counsel, Law Institute of Victoria president elect and Victorian barrister Robert Richter QC.

'Today is a victory for what is just and right. Legal aid funding is a key basis for ensuring access to justice for disadvantaged Victorians.'

The announcement helps make real the human rights contained in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*, including the right to a fair hearing – part of which requires the right to legal advice as well as to legal representation.'

'The Federal Government now needs to follow the Victorian Government's lead on legal aid funding. VCOSS supports the call of the legal community for the Federal Government to restore legal aid funding in its next budget to pre-97 levels.'

'Protecting the rights of disadvantaged Victorians and Australians is a joint responsibility of the State and Federal Governments. The Victorian Government has made its commitment – the Federal Government now needs to act to support greater equity for all.'

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