



NEWS

RIPPED OFF: Elderly robbed by families are denied justice



by SHERELE MOODY

30th May 2018 5:35 AM

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JUSTICE experts are pushing for more funding to stop vulnerable Mackay residents falling through the legal cracks.

Mackay, Moranbah, Sarina and Proserpine magistrates handled about 11,060 criminal and civil cases last financial year, the Magistrates Courts of Queensland Annual Report shows.

A total of 6310 adult defendants and 248 children faced 11,808 charges in 2016-17.

Magistrates also dealt with 1767 breaches of bail, probation and suspended sentences; 877 civil claims, 1767 domestic and family violence order cases; and 492 child protection order actions.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre manager Jessica Brake said her organisation was particularly concerned about older residents on limited incomes who faced self-representing in civil cases after being ripped off by their family members.

Ms Brake said the region needed a specific elder abuse legal service that would have social workers and lawyers to help them navigate their legal path.

"If people do not get legal support as soon as possible, delays will lead to negative consequences for them," Ms Brake said.

"We've had people whose children have taken their homes and their money and the parents are left destitute and without enough money to pay for a solicitor."

The State Government needed to invest more money in community and low-cost legal services, said Bill Potts, whose firm represents clients in our region.

"We build bridges, we build roads, we build tunnels but why don't we spend that kind of money on the justice system?" the deputy president of the Queensland Law Society said.

"We have people being denied justice - they are being convicted or they can't appeal properly because they are being denied access to a system that favours those who have the resources for representation."

The Queensland Government said it had invested millions in rolling out specialist courts and resourcing support services.

Daily Mercury



Children and young people figured strongly in the 2016-17 Queensland courts across both criminal justice and child protection issues.

Pictures: napatcha

justice educators, lawyers and youth support plus family support workers who would connect with disfranchised young people and direct them away from criminal activities.

The service would be modelled on the Youth Advocacy Centre that operates in Brisbane.

"A lot of young people could be kept out of the justice system if we support them and their families early on," Ms Wright said.

"It needs to be about early intervention and prevention services that support young people to deal with issues that might bring them into contact with the law," she said.

Child Safety Minister Di Farmer would not commit to rolling out a youth advocacy centre.

Instead, she said our young people could access a "number of agencies including the Office of the Public Guardian and Youth Legal Aid".



Queensland Law Society deputy president Bill Potts says the State Government needs to invest more money in community legal services.

Pictures: Contributed

Our courts are keeping on top of their caseloads

THE Mackay District Court has one of the state's better clearance rates.

A total of 199 new defendants faced the court last financial year and 208 cases were finalised.

There are 33 cases still active from previous years.

The 2016-17 District Court of Queensland Annual Report shows the court has a 104 per cent clearance rate - about in the middle of the state figures.

The Mackay Supreme Court dealt with 85 cases in 2016-17 and finalised 82.

It still has 21 active cases from previous years and a clearance rate of 96.5 per cent - also about in the middle of the state figures.

In her annual report to parliament, Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine Holmes said case backlogs showed there was a need for more judicial officers to be appointed.

"The inability to reduce the active pending matters ... highlights the need for additional judicial resources to meet the increasing demand," Justice Holmes said.

Queensland Law Society deputy president Bill Potts called on the State Government to appoint five more district court judges, three more supreme court justices and 10 more magistrates.

A spokeswoman for Attorney General Yvette D'Ath said the Attorney General would "continue to work with" Chief Justice Holmes and the District Court of Queensland chief judge and the chief magistrate on resource allocations.

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BY THE NUMBERS

Mackay Magistrate Courts 2016-17 performance:

Adult defendants - 6310

Adult charges - 11,251

Child defendants - 248

Child charges - 557

Breaches of bail and court orders - 1370

Domestic and family violence orders - 1767

Child protection orders - 492