

# Vulnerable residents denied justice in court

## Experts push for increased funding in legal system

SHERELE MOODY

[Sherele.Moody@newsregionalmedia.com.au](mailto:Sherele.Moody@newsregionalmedia.com.au)

**EXCLUSIVE:** 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 this 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. This included providing \$85.1 million for Legal Aid and passing on Federal Government funding to community legal centres, a spokeswoman for Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath said.

### BY THE NUMBERS

#### Mackay Magistrate Courts 2016-17:

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  
 Civil cases - 877  
 Source: Queensland Government

**“ WE BUILD BRIDGES, WE BUILD ROADS, WE BUILD TUNNELS BUT WHY DON'T WE SPEND THAT KIND OF MONEY ON THE JUSTICE SYSTEM? ”**