



No. 20

ACT Government tackles Supreme Court delays

The ACT Government is addressing delays in the Supreme Court with an additional \$2.668 million to improve court efficiency and provide Canberrans with better access to the justice system, Attorney General, Simon Corbell, said today.

Mr Corbell said the 2010-11 Budget allocated \$1.6 million in funding over four years to provide for the establishment of a district court in the ACT and an acting judge of the Supreme Court.

“The district court proposal would see an Australian-first with the formation of a ‘virtual’ district court jurisdiction,” he said.

Under the proposal, which is still subject to consultation and further public comment, two existing magistrates would be appointed to also perform duties in the district court jurisdiction.

“The funding also provides for the appointment of an acting judge for up to nine months to clear the backlog that has built up in the Supreme Court and to assist the courts to transition to the new district court arrangement,” Mr Corbell said.

As part of this arrangement, the office of the registrar in the Magistrates Court will be provided with additional support for a two year period.

This additional budget funding is significantly less expensive than the costs associated with providing an additional Supreme Court judge which amount to approximately \$820,000 per year.

“The funding provided to create a new District Court jurisdiction will reduce reliance on both existing tiers of the court system, the Magistrates and Supreme Courts,” Mr Corbell said.

“The District Court will be presided over by judicial officers holding dual commissions, will utilise existing court buildings, and will draw on existing resources to minimise the financial impost, but achieve maximum impact in reducing the workload of the courts.

“The Government has also provided \$450,000 capital funding and \$620,000 operational funding over four years to enable both the new district court jurisdiction and the Supreme Court to hold more trials. The capital funding will enable two hearing rooms vacated by the ACAT in the Magistrates Court building to be renovated and upgraded for use as a jury courtroom and a jurors’ retiring room, while the operational funding will meet the costs associated with the extra trials and jurors.

“Last year, the Government announced funding for a study to investigate options for streamlining courts administration to ensure the judicial system suits our unique jurisdiction and its changing needs.

“Unlike most other jurisdictions in Australia, the ACT has no intermediate court tier. This gap places pressure on judicial resources, especially in the form of the case load of judges in the Supreme Court,” Mr Corbell added.

“In conjunction with this announcement I am releasing the *2010 Access to Justice Initiative* paper for community consultation.”

The views of the ACT community are sought on the major issues canvassed in the *2010 Access to Justice Initiative* paper until Friday, 11 June 2010. The report is available from the website of the Department of Justice and Community Safety: www.justice.act.gov.au

Comments may be made using the submission function on the department’s website or sent by email to accesstojustice@act.gov.au or by post to:

2010 Access to Justice Initiative
c/- Legislation and Policy Branch
Department of Justice and Community Safety
PO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

4 May 2010

Media Contact: Patrick Cronan 6205 0401 (w) 0432 758 224 (m)
patrick.cronan@act.gov.au