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CLP MUST SAVE LEGAL SERVICE FOR NHULUNBUY REGION

Member for Nhulunbuy, Lynne Walker today called on the Attorney General John Elferink to find the funds to keep the Northern Australian Aboriginal Justice Association’s (NAAJA) office opened in Nhulunbuy, following its decision to close mid next year.

“Because of federal funding cuts, NAAJA has been left with no choice but to close its Nhulunbuy office which provides civil and criminal legal services as well as an educative support function,” Ms Walker said.

She said the six positions based in Nhulunbuy will now be relocated to Darwin effectively depriving the community of any face to face legal representation.

“It’s imperative that the Attorney-General Mr Elferink find the necessary funds to keep the Nhulunbuy office open as it services not just the town but also the wider region,” Ms Walker said.

“Has anyone in the Giles Government picked up the phone to Tony Abbott, the self-declared Prime Minister for indigenous Australians, to tell him this is just wrong?”

Ms Walker said it was now imperative that Mr Abbott meet with NAAJA board members when he visits the region in September to hear first-hand the implications of this short-sighted funding cut.

“This news is also a blow for Nhulunbuy at a time when Adam Giles had given a commitment to retain services and support jobs. A crucial service will be phased out of Nhulunbuy from the end of this year and with it six local jobs,” Ms Walker said.

“The Giles Government clearly has its priorities wrong.

“While NAAJA will be working hard to ensure no reduction of service to clients they are simply unable to provide a walk-in, face-to-face service.”

Ms Walker said telephone access can be difficult for clients in remote parts of Arnhemland and for people whose first language is not English.

“This is a huge blow for indigenous people in accessing justice and legal aid, at a time when draconian CLP laws are seeing more indigenous people
locked up, whether for mandatory alcohol treatment or under their minimum mandatory sentencing laws,” Ms Walker said.

“Sadly the CLP is content to invest $2.5m for an unconsulted corrections facility in the centre of Nhulunbuy which has come at the price of closing a successful residential alcohol and drugs rehabilitation centre, now they must find similar money for legal services.”

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