JUSTICE NOT SERVED BY GOVERNMENT’S NEGLECT

The problems described by Justice Eames today in a sexual assault case in Alice Springs highlights the Labor Government’s neglect of Alice Springs, says Shadow Attorney-General, Jodeen Carney.

“This is the second time this particular case has been abandoned because of poor equipment,” says Ms Carney.

“The fact that His Honour made such scathing criticisms of the equipment at the Alice Springs Courthouse should jolt the Government into action.

“The problems with the vulnerable witness facilities have been well-known for some time, and this is not the first time there have been difficulties with the equipment.

“During the Estimates Committee hearing last year, I questioned then Attorney-General Syd Stirling about the inadequate facilities’. (An extract of some of the difficulties experienced is attached *)

“The equipment for witnesses to pre-record their evidence and for it to subsequently be played to the Court is sub-standard, and needs to be fixed immediately.

“By contrast, the equipment in Darwin is considered to be ‘state of the art’.

“There should be equal access to justice for all – there should not be two different standards, one in Darwin; another in Alice Springs.

“The costs of an abandoned trial are significant, and Government must step up, admit that there are problems and fix them.

“Government Ministers talk about protecting victims of crime, but not one of them has seriously tried to solve the ongoing difficulties that exist in Alice Springs, whether it’s the equipment or the facilities for vulnerable witnesses’.

“Enough is enough – the Attorney-General, or the Treasurer must announce that they will fix these problems so that justice can be served.”
Attached:

**Carney to Stirling on 26 June 2007**: In relation to the new room for vulnerable witnesses at the Alice Springs courthouse, which is meant to be a private and safe area for them to wait before they are giving their evidence, do you know, Minister, that victims still have to come through the front door of the courthouse in full view of defendants and anyone else at a time when a side-door is available that is not used?

Do you know that the room in question is about a metre and a half from a courtroom where accused people walk in and out?

Do you know why the room is next to - and I mean pretty close, like very close – is next to the robing area for lawyers to robe and disrobe, and by lawyers, of course, I mean lawyers acting for the accused?

Do you know why victims who use that room have to, when they want to go to the toilet, go through the relatively small but public foyer in the Alice Springs courthouse past members of the public and defendants?

Do you know and are you concerned that the room that is meant to provide safety and privacy for vulnerable witnesses, namely or for the most part, women and children, ensures that those women and children – so do you know that the room in question is not satisfactory for vulnerable witnesses because they have to run the gauntlet every time they come in and go out of the courthouse and every time they want to go to the toilet, and for the other reasons I have outlined? Do you know those things, Attorney-General?

**Further comment: Jodeen Carney 8951 5588**