

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**STATE BUDGET PROVIDES MIXED-BAG FOR
VICTIMS**

The tug-of-war at the heart of the State Government's approach to its "Transforming Criminal Justice" agenda was thrown in to light by yesterday's State Budget.

On the one hand, the Government's 2014 Election promise of a new courts precinct appears to have been stymied for years to come. So much so that the Budget allocated an immediate spend of nearly \$1m to conduct urgent repairs to the District Court Building on Victoria Square. These emergency measures emphasise the crumbling state of our court buildings.

On the other hand, the Victim Support Service (VSS) welcomes the allocation of \$20 million to develop the judicial system's electronic case management system and just over \$2 million to develop a new prosecution management system for the Office of the Department of Public Prosecutions (ODPP).

"Victims and witnesses of crime are having to wait for long periods of time before their matters are finalised," Mr Roffe said.

"On average, it takes 14 weeks from case initiation to finalisation in all criminal courts in South Australia, compared with 5.7 weeks Australia wide."

"Our experience supporting victims tells us that trial delays are not only extremely frustrating for victims and their families, but can significantly lengthen a victim's recovery process."

"An electronic upgrade of the judiciary's case management system and the new prosecution management system should go some way to making the court process more efficient for victims."

The investment in 84 additional beds at Mount Gambier Prison and a new high dependency unit at Yatala Labour Prison, announced in the Budget, contrasts with the Government's failure to deliver on its promise to fund two justice reinvestment pilot programs. Justice reinvestment seeks to address the root causes of offending by investing in communities with high rates of criminal behaviour. It is disappointing that the Government has not sought to at least match their investment in prisons with investment in early intervention and crime prevention programs that could, ultimately, improve community safety and reduce the ever-growing cost of incarcerating offenders.

VSS welcomed the announcement that just over \$13 million would be used to equip police officers with portable data entry devices and body worn video equipment.



“We anticipate that the new devices will not only support the important work of the police in keeping the community safe, but will also help capture evidence of crimes against victims which could be used in court.”

But VSS is disappointed that, to date, little progress appears to have been made with the development of a Crime Tracking App for victims of crime. \$1 million was allocated from last year’s State Budget to SAPOL for the new App, designed to enable victims to track the investigation and progress of their reported crimes through the judicial system.

“A key issue for many victims who report crime is feeling left out or ignored during the police investigation and subsequent court process. We hoped that the introduction of this app would make the whole process, from the initial report of a crime right through to sentencing, more transparent for victims wanting information about their case, but so far we have seen little progress” Mr Roffe said.

Yesterday the State Government confirmed that it would contribute just over \$17 million as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, first signed by the State and Federal Governments in 2008. This funding agreement secures the immediate future of ‘Staying Home, Staying Safe’, the home security program that VSS delivers to support victims of family and domestic violence.

Outside the Budget, VSS also welcomed the State Government’s confirmation that it will introduce a Bill to Parliament in July to increase a range of compensation payments to victims of crime.

“In the lead up to the 2014 State Election, the State Government promised to double the maximum amount payable to victims under the Victims of Crime Compensation (VOCC) Scheme from \$50,000 to \$100,000 and to allow grief payments to be made to victims under the age of 18,” Mr Roffe said.

“For over 20 years, the statutory maximum of \$50,000 had remained the same. We are very pleased that the State Government has confirmed that amending victims of crime compensation is one promise it will keep.”

Victims and witnesses seeking support or information can contact the Victim Support Service Helpline on 1800VICTIM or by visiting the website at www.victimsa.org.

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