

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Court closure a sad day for justice

Today's announcement by Chief Justice, Kris Kourakis, that the Holden Hill Magistrates Court will close in September is a sad day for justice in South Australia.

Backlogs in our court system mean that victims and witnesses are waiting for extensive periods of time for their matters to be finalised, and to have resolution. This was identified in 'Transforming Criminal Justice', a recent strategic overview released by the Attorney General, John Rau, as a key weakness of the current system. The average time taken from case initiation to finalisation in the Magistrates Court in SA, for example, is 13.7 weeks – compared with 5.1 weeks Australia wide.

The backflip on the original decision to close regional court circuits, made in 2013-14, is a clear admission from the Courts Administration Authority that the administration of justice is damaged when courts are closed.

This is why the decision by the CAA to preserve courts at Port Adelaide, Mount Barker and Tanunda, and to reinstate some regional court circuits, is a big win for the community that spoke so passionately against their closure.

VSS supports the intent of the CAA to increase accessibility to the courts through technology in response to changing community expectations for online and other electronic services. For too long the use of technology in South Australian courts has lagged behind modern business practices. A recent survey of victims by VSS showed that they would support the use of technology to allow victims, witnesses, prosecutors, and defence lawyers to appear by video link instead of in person in court.

The Victim Support Service submission to the public consultation on the impact of court closures can be viewed at www.victimsa.org.

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