

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**1 July 2016**

## Victims re-traumatised by archaic criminal justice system

### KEY POINTS

- An independent review into the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) found South Australia has the highest rate of withdrawn prosecutions and longer-than-average times to resolve cases.
- Whilst efficiency gains and staff increases may improve the speed of justice, more attention needs to be given to procedures and attitudes that impede the full engagement of victims by the ODPP in the decision-making process as their case proceeds through the justice system.
- Poor practice can lead to secondary victimisation.

An independent review into the ODPP has found that there is significant room for improvement with regard to the management of criminal cases.

It found that South Australia has the highest rate of withdrawn prosecutions and longer-than-average times to resolve cases.

Victim Support Service (VSS) Chief Executive Julian Roffe said the current system is cumbersome, with too many complex procedures and archaic working practices.

"A key recommendation that came out of the review was the implementation of systems to modernise the ODPP," Mr Roffe said.

"Whilst a commitment to efficiency is welcome, more consideration needs to be given to procedural mechanisms that could better integrate victim's views within the existing system to make criminal justice administration more accountable. This includes forms of consultation before important decisions such as altering or dropping of charges are made by the ODPP. This is particularly important where the early resolution of a case could deny a victim access to financial compensation."

As it stands, the rights of victims enshrined in legislation, including the right to be consulted on conditions of bail and the prosecution process, remain largely overlooked by criminal justice agencies in South Australia.

Research suggests that when victims of crime are subjected to inadequate, insensitive or inappropriate treatment or practices by criminal justice agencies the effect is often to compound their original trauma, causing 'secondary victimisation'.

“The right for victims to challenge decisions of the ODPP should also be strengthened,” Mr Roffe said.

“A clear procedure is needed through which victims can ask the ODPP to lodge an appeal against a conviction and/or the leniency of a sentence. Should the ODPP determine not to proceed with an appeal, the victim should receive the reasons behind the decision in writing and have the right to request a judicial officer of the appeals court to examine their grounds for appeal and determine whether, in the public interest, an appeal should be heard”.

**ENDS**

### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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**Victim Support Service (VSS)** is a statewide, not-for-profit organisation that provides practical and therapeutic support to victims and witnesses of crime in South Australia. Our services include:

- information and advocacy
- counselling
- practical assistance
- support for victims of family/domestic abuse.

For more information go to [www.victimsa.org](http://www.victimsa.org).