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## State Budget a lost opportunity to make NSW fairer

Today's budget delivers a disappointing outlook for the future of access to justice in New South Wales and is a missed opportunity to address rising inequality and disadvantage.

Over the past two years, our communities have been impacted by rolling disasters, spikes in domestic and family violence and sexual assault, deepening financial hardship, precarious housing and homelessness, and ongoing systemic racism and discrimination in the criminal legal system. The need for significant reform to make NSW fairer – including investment in diversionary programs, justice reinvestment, and community-based legal services – has never been greater.

The government's 'business-as-usual' approach leaves people experiencing disadvantage and discrimination behind.

We welcome the government's investment in frontline domestic violence services, which will help traditionally under resourced services meet critical and rising need. We also welcome the expansion of the Drug Court to Dubbo and hope this indicates the government's willingness to bring NSW's drug laws into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, we're concerned at the absence of specific funding to implement the recommendations of The Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'.

The budget delivers no new investment in the community legal assistance sector, nor in community-based measures to address deaths in custody and the ongoing over-incarceration of First Nations people in NSW. It also delivers grossly insufficient investment in social housing to meet the state's chronic housing crisis.

Instead, the government has allocated significant funds to police and prisons: \$41.5 million for an extra 250 police officers, and record capital investments in police station upgrades, equipment and expanding the state's prison system.

"What we need is greater investment in community-based supports, justice re-investment initiatives and diversionary programs, rather than harmful, punitive approaches. We're disappointed the NSW Budget fails to deliver on this vision."

The \$12 million slated to promote the permanent adoption and guardianship of children in out-of-home care would have been better spent keeping kids with family and kin.

"Our vision for justice is grounded in our everyday work supporting people experiencing disadvantage, discrimination and violence manage their legal problems. We know what works to build stronger communities and to reduce harmful interactions with the criminal legal system," said Tim Leach, Executive Director of Community Legal Centres NSW.

"Communities have the solutions to deliver a more just future. We just need the government to invest in them," Leach said.