

Tuesday 13 February 2024

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP  
Attorney-General  
Shop 1/87 Sydney Street  
Kilmore VIC 3764  
By email: [jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Dear Attorney-General,

Financial Counselling Victoria represents over 300 practising financial counsellors across the state, who report to us that they currently have nowhere to refer small business owners with legal issues requiring assistance.

The supports and interventions that financial counsellors provide help small business owners to negotiate affordable payment arrangements, continue trading and contributing to the state economy, and stabilising household financial security. However, despite this vital assistance provided by our members, there is a clear service gap where their clients require legal aid to resolve business operational issues that are outside the scope of financial counselling.

The issue is that while there are currently 47 community legal centres across Victoria, none are accessible to small business owners – whose legal needs come to the fore when they are least likely to be able to afford legal assistance.

With our partners the Federation of Community Legal Centres and Consumer Action Law Centre, we have developed a proposal for a Specialist Small Business Community Legal Centre (CLC) for Victoria, which I include as an attachment to this letter.

We believe that establishing a specialist Small Business CLC would leverage the proven infrastructure, governance and funding model of CLCs to deliver essential services for small businesses across the state, integrating closely with the small business wellbeing program.

**Attorney-General, I seek a meeting with you to discuss this proposal further.** Along with our project partners, I believe that the establishment of a Small Business CLC will not only respond appropriately to the ‘long tail’ of the economic and social impacts from the disasters of recent years, but also ensure that small businesses will continue to be supported in the years to come.

I note that I have sent a similar invitation to meet, along with our proposal, to the Minister for Small Business, the Hon. Natalie Suleyman MP, given the alignment of this proposal with her portfolio.

Minister, to further discuss the establishment of a Specialist Small Business CLC as detailed in this letter and the attached proposal, please contact me directly on [zylhw@fcvic.org.au](mailto:zylhw@fcvic.org.au).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zyl Hovenga-Wauchope', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Zyl Hovenga-Wauchope  
Executive Officer  
Financial Counselling Victoria