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**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **'Where's the money going to go?' Family Court Fee hike Questioned**

The Federal Government has failed to adequately justify the increases in court fees for the Family Court effective 1 January 2013, according to the national peak body for family and relationship services.

Following the announcement yesterday of a Senate Inquiry into the fee increases, FRSA Executive Director Steve Hackett said that if the Government continues with these increases, then revenue must be used to improve the capacity of mediation services.

"FRSA supports the Senate Inquiry into these increases, as it seems very peculiar that the Government would support its access to justice initiatives through increasing fees for a very broad spectrum of federal court users. It is not appropriate that the same policy tool used to deter corporate litigants would also be used to discourage individuals and vulnerable families from seeking relief through the judicial system." said Mr Hackett.

"However, to the extent that the fee increases have been introduced as a measure to force potential litigants into mediation, then consideration needs to be given to the downstream effects and any revenue raised through the measures needs to be directed to supporting families to access services outside of the court system."

"If the Federal Government is going to continue with this measure, then it's imperative that they recognise that Government funded services that support families going through mediation, such as Family Relationship Centres need to be funded appropriately."

"Thus far, this does not appear to be the case and unfortunately, Family Relationship Centres have been feeling the full effect of funding cuts enforced in 2012 and are in no position to manage additional clients, which is what may occur if this policy has the desired effect of redirecting individuals away from the court."

"Essentially, family and relationship services will continue to be overburdened with clients looking for help and the longer vulnerable families have to wait; the longer children in particular will remain at risk."

According to the Law Council of Australia, approximately \$68 million over four years has not been allocated from the increased court fee revenue, and it is inappropriate that family law fees would be used to prop up consolidated revenue (*The Australian*, 15 February). The Government is yet to indicate whether additional financial support will be provided to family and relationship services in the upcoming budget to handle the anticipated influx of clients.

"Hopefully, the Senate Inquiry will identify this need and call on the Government to adequately direct funds to organisations that provide invaluable support services to vulnerable families."

"Certainly, we hope the Senate Inquiry will recommend that research on the impact of these revised court fees will be commissioned and undertaken within the first 12 months of operation."

**Family & Relationship Services Australia is the national peak body for over 150 family relationship and support service providers, operating in more than 650 locations across Australia. For more information visit**

[www.frsa.org.au](http://www.frsa.org.au)

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