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MEDIA RELEASE

Peak Body questions fee increases for Federal Courts

The national peak body for family and relationship services has used their submission to the Senate Inquiry into Federal Court fees increases to push for the revenue raised to be redirected back to mediation and other support services.

As reported today in *The Australian*, Family & Relationship Services Australia argues that the increases will force more vulnerable families to seek mediation services that are already struggling to cope with demand and discourage those who need the court's assistance.

"If the federal government is going to continue with this measure, than it's imperative they recognise that Government funded services that support families going through mediation and counselling, such as Family Relationship Centres need to be funded appropriately", said FRSA Executive Director Steve Hackett.

"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 without increasing waiting times further."

"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."

As detailed in FRSA's submission, the federal government has failed to adequately justify the increases in fees for the Federal Courts, which were introduced from January 2013. The filing fee increases do not, for example, reflect the capacity of different types of litigants to pay.

"Applying these measures to public companies with considerable resources is one thing, but in the Family Court the fees have increased by about 20 per cent, including for filing new matters, divorce and even conciliation conferences."

"To the extent that fee increases have been introduced as a measure to force potential litigants into mediation, FRSA believes consideration needs to be given to the downstream effects."

"The revenue raised from the increases needs to be directed to supporting families to access services outside of the court system, such as improving the capacity of mediation services. According to the Law Council of Australia, approximately \$68 million over four years of this revenue has not been allocated in forward estimates."

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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

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