

Dear Editor

The sensationist headline ('Aboriginal legal centre spent \$52,000 on library' 9 October 2015) misleads in the omission of facts made known to the journalist. The amount spent on the law library for the Aboriginal Legal Service in Tasmania was for two libraries at each end of the State, and for the information of those who don't know, online legal subscriptions are also expensive.

Moreover, we always managed our service within the allocated budget whilst still providing legal aid for all eligible clients who came within the Attorney-General's Department's guidelines.

Our higher than average number of civil cases, which included domestic violence matters, never posed a risk of clients being imprisoned for criminal matters as those matters always received highest priority.

The establishment of contingency funds for building upgrade and maintenance and for redundancies was prudent financial practice which the auditors did not find dubious. In fact their financial health check considered our finances "low risk".

Our retainer arrangement with a law firm was established by ex Supreme Court Justice Pierre Slicer AM in the 1970s, not by Michael Mansell in the 1990s and had been known to the Department for many years.

The allocation of a percent of each program budget to pay for administration expenses is a well-accepted financial practice and the "small change" I agreed with your reporter about was a program of \$10,000 out of over \$10 million from which administration costs were not charged.

The quoting of a statement from the Department in relation to the retained firm that duplication might result in a profit margin is a nonsense as the firm was physically unable to make a profit as it received no income, instead having its costs paid directly to the suppliers.

Far from the Department's documents revealing the decision to put our service to tender was justified, the auditor's findings, when put in the context of our long course of dealing with the Department, show just the opposite.

Heather Sculthorpe

CEO

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

15 October 2015