

News

**Council law costs state \$165,000**

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LEGISLATION banning local councillors from working for MPs has cost the State Government \$165,000 in severance payments, as a planned legal action against the Government looks unlikely to proceed.

Eighteen State Parliament and eight Federal Parliament employees chose to leave their jobs and three resigned from their councils in the seven-day grace period after the legislation's enactment.

Sixteen departing councillors took a pay-out from the Parliament, which included signing deeds of release that waived their legal rights and included a confidentiality clause.

The Conflicting Duties Bill was passed last month in response to the damning Ombudsman's report on Brimbank Council.

In a report in May, Ombudsman George Brouwer recommended the Local Government Act be amended to prevent councillors working for MPs.

Mr Brouwer found that in Brimbank unelected persons, including Labor MPs, had exercised undue influence over councils, and in some cases councillors had a conflict of interest between their jobs and council responsibilities.

The third resignation, from Brimbank councillor Robert Bozinovski, came just 20 minutes before the council was sacked and an administrator installed in September.

The Municipal Association of Victoria has legal advice that said the Conflicting Duties Bill was a breach of the **Charter of Human Rights** and Responsibilities Act. But a challenge to a law under the act must be brought by an affected party, not a representative body. The MAV called on councils to fund a challenge, but none has.

Legislative Assembly Speaker Jenny Lindell and Legislative Council President Bob Smith negotiated a severance package with the public sector union that gave staff a pay-out of up to 14 weeks' pay. Staff were also entitled to notice period pay and career transition pay.

Mr Smith said the total cost of the severance deal was \$165,000 and a deed of release was standard business practice.

A Victorian Electoral Commission spokeswoman said countbacks would be conducted for vacancies on Wyndham and Glen Eira councils.

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