

GENERAL

Human rights Act will cost millions just to train public servants

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Up to \$7 million will need to be spent on extra training for public servants and additional resources for State Government departments under controversial plans to introduce a human rights Act, WAS public service union says.

Community and Public Sector Union secretary Toni Walkington said dedicated training would be crucial in ensuring compliance, with a similar amount of money spent when a human rights Act was introduced in Victoria.

Ms Walkington said the Government must also consider the increase in public servants workloads likely to result from complying with the new laws, which will affect department policies and procedures.

A CPSU submission to a Government-appointed committee set up to investigate a human rights Act reveals the unions support for the laws, but calls for a recognition of broader social and economic rights, such as adequate food and shelter, to tackle issues faced by the disadvantaged.

Attorney-General Jim McGinty, who is leading the Government push for a human rights Act, has refused to comment on whether training for public servants has been considered or whether compliance will be phased in to allow public agencies to review policies and procedures.

The human rights committee, chaired by former deputy president of the National Native Title Tribunal, Fred Chaney, has received more than 260 written submissions on the plan to enshrine basic rights in law. Critics fear it could jeopardise key laws and social policies, while others support the Act but say it does not go far enough.

The CPSU submission opposes plans to limit the Act to Government departments and agencies, calling in particular for non-government organisations contracted to perform public functions and services to also be bound by the laws.

It also wants breaches of human rights to give rise to potential court orders for compensation and should create a new cause of legal action - both specifically excluded in the Governments draft Act. A UnionsWA submission supports moves to codify human rights, but says there are too many limitations in the Act.