

12 June 2026

Our ref: LP:MC

Operational Policy Design and Implementation
Courts and Tribunals
Department of Justice
GPO Box 1649
Brisbane QLD 4001

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Department,

**Implementation of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation
of People with Disability (DRC) – Recommendation 8.11**

Accessible Queensland Court and Tribunal Services – Consultation Paper (Paper)

The Queensland Law Society (**Society**) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback in response to the Department's consultation regarding Accessible Queensland Courts and Tribunals and implementation of DRC recommendation 8.11.

At the outset, we note DRC recommendation 8.11 contains two discrete components: first the need for a consultative, evidence-based approach to determining the type of information that should be provided regarding the seeking and making of adjustments; and second, the effective promulgation of that information across the judiciary, legal profession and court staff.

As the peak body representing solicitors in Queensland, the Society plays a critical role in supporting dissemination of information about the availability of adjustments and the supports and services available for people with disability who are navigating courts and tribunals. In addition to its other functions, the Society is a primary communication channel to Queensland's legal profession. As such, we consider maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the Department is essential to ensuring the timely and consistent communication of resources and information. This partnership is critical to ensuring people with disability are treated equitably and fairly within Queensland's courts and tribunal and the justice system continues to evolve in line with contemporary accessibility standards and community expectations.

The Society also draws attention to the significant expertise available through its legal policy and membership committees, including the Disability and Accessibility Network (**the DAN**) and the Equity and Diversity Committee, in addition to its wider membership with lived experience and specialist knowledge and expertise in relation to the barriers faced by people with disability in their interactions with the courts and tribunal. Our committees bring together practitioners with

deep practical insight into the procedural, communication, environmental and attitudinal challenges that continue to impede equitable access and inclusion. Their collective experience positions the Society to provide informed, evidence-based advice on the development of accessibility resources and practices, the design of adjustments and the operational realities of implementing them across the courts and tribunal.

In this respect, the Society takes this opportunity to bring to the Department's attention the recent committee consultation it undertook, led by the DAN and the Equity and Diversity Committee and other legal policy committees with members who practice in the courts, including the Human Rights and Public Law Committee, which culminated in proactive advocacy to The Honourable Chief Justice Bowskill. This consultation drew on the lived experience and professional expertise of practitioners who have experienced and regularly observe the barriers faced by people with disability in the Queensland courts and tribunal.

The resulting letter, **enclosed** with this submission, sets out substantive and considered recommendations for practical improvements and initiatives aimed at addressing those barriers. We commend those recommendations to you as part of this consultation.

In addition to the guidance already contained in the recently updated third edition of Queensland's Equal Opportunity Bench Book (**Bench Book**), and our recommendations to the Chief Justice, the Society encourages consideration of the additional measures and options for improvement set out below.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department to develop and promote these resources to ensure they remain contemporary, accessible and responsive to the needs of people with disability.

However, we caution that the implementation of recommendation 8.11 should not be pursued in isolation. In this regard, we draw your attention to the Law Council of Australia's 2018 Justice Project final report recommendation regarding the establishment of a dedicated disability committee with experts on disability, including people with lived experience of disability, to develop and promote disability training for judges, magistrates and tribunal members. The DRC endorsed this recommendation and suggested that all jurisdictions adopt a similar approach. The insights and capabilities of a consulting committee of this kind would play an invaluable role in guiding the practical application of the Bench Book across the various courts and tribunal.

In formulating this submission, our members have raised the following additional issues and potential adjustments for consideration:

Physical infrastructure barriers

- Court lifts requiring security guards to access;
- Parking options for people with disability (supported by information on courthouse websites as to location and areas for drop off/pick up locations where necessary);¹
- Consistency in terms of electronic doors to support wheelchair users with disability accessing toilets;
- If the courthouse has stairs or steps, accessibility alternatives such as ramp or lift access should be provided, along with handrails to support safe movement. Similarly, where a witness box involves steps, appropriate handrails should be installed to assist individuals to safely enter and, exit.

¹ [Queensland Law Society, Accessibility in the Courts \(Submission, December 2025\), 6.](#)

Measures to support access to justice

- Additional resources/supports are required for completion of online and hard copy forms, particularly when a person's disability impacts literacy;
- Digital literacy also needs to be considered as variable across the community which can be an added barrier;
- These issues are compounded by limited access to free or low-cost legal assistance.

Information barriers

- The DAN has previously proposed the option of an 'accessibility liaison' at courthouses. The Society supports a central contact point for practitioners at their respective courthouse to speak to regarding accessibility concerns. This contact could inform the presiding judicial officer as needed. An accessibility liaison may also assist judicial officers where resources or support is needed for a self-represented party and to support the Bench Book;
- Development of an online form where a client, witness, legal practitioner or other court/tribunal has a disability requiring additional assistance or support;²
- Parties should be routinely provided with information relevant to accessibility supports and facilities available at the relevant court or tribunal to ensure they can effectively plan and participate in proceedings. This could be a pro forma addendum to any notices or communication issued by a court

Accessibility of information and resources

- Members have identified a need for a review to be conducted of online forms and webpages to ensure they are accessible to screen readers;
- The Bench Book should be made available in more accessible formats including by video, audio and in easy English;
- There should be enhanced visibility of the Bench Book for all court and tribunal users so that avenues for seeking adjustments and practical solutions for people with disability are identifiable, clear and accessible;
- Increased recognition of, and training in relation to, use of the sunflower lanyard to indicate not readily visible disabilities (including neurodivergence). Members suggest it would be beneficial for the courts to provide online information about where to collect a lanyard for example and the associated process.³

Flexibility in the court room settings

- Greater flexibility is needed in the court room setting where procedures can be very structured and may not always accommodate varying disability needs for example:
 - Information may need to be broken down and provided at a slower pace to allow recipients to digest and understand information;
 - Consideration should be given to clearly identifying which matters or courts permit online appearance (for example, for mentions), along with clear guidance on the

² However, disability data must only be collected in a de-identified way and not for use in the matter. It must only be collected with the informed consent of the person with disability and on a case-by-case basis.

³ The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard can be used to discreetly communicate the need for accessibility and reasonable adjustments. See for example <https://www.bne.com.au/passenger/passengerinformation/assistance/hidden-disabilities>; Queensland Law Society, *Accessibility in the Courts* (Submission, December 2025), 3.

- process for requesting remote attendance when users are not able to attend in person; and
- Consideration as to the format of hearings including when breaks may be required.

Stakeholder consultation

The Society strongly recommends consultation and co-design with people with disability, disability organisations and other key stakeholders.

As noted by the DRC, “Co-design includes each aspect of the design of services, systems, policies, laws and research, and entails developing proposed approaches and alternatives and identifying preferred solutions.”⁴

In addition to engagement with our various committees and broader membership, the Society actively engages with several bodies, organisations and individuals with specialist expertise in disability inclusion and accessibility, and strongly recommends the Department directly engages with all relevant experts as part of this consultation process. We specifically highlight the recent project series being undertaken by the Public Advocate, Dr John Chesterman, in relation to the experience of adults with cognitive disability in the Queensland criminal justice system. In brief, Dr Chesterman has progressively released five discussion papers on topics focusing on policing, the courts, the forensic system (mental health and disability), detention, and victims and witnesses.⁵ We understand Dr Chesterman is currently in the process of completing a final report containing reform recommendations. We strongly recommend engagement with the Public Advocate in respect of that work and findings relevant to this consultation.

We also recommend consideration of Dr Danielle Bozin’s, and colleagues, recent research and publications including *Understanding the impact of neurodiversity on witness credibility assessment in courts, tribunals and commissions*⁶ and *Judicial perspectives on neurodiversity in Queensland courts, tribunals and commissions: Experiences with disclosure and witness credibility*⁷.

The Law Council’s Justice Project, Part 1: People with Disability chapter⁸, also sets out several recommendations which should be considered in this context as well:

- considering how evidence law frameworks respond to adducing evidence from witnesses with complex communication needs;
- increasing critical support services; and
- co-design of a State Disability Justice Plan or strategy. As noted in our letter to the Chief Justice, as the Department of Justice’s Disability Service Plan 2022-25 has now expired, we strongly recommend the new plan include courts and tribunal accessibility and be underpinned by a co-design process with people living with disability who access the courts.

⁴ [First Progress Report](#) at p 16.

⁵ <https://www.publicadvocate.qld.gov.au/our-advocacy/justice-and-human-rights/adults-with-cognitive-disability-in-the-criminal-justice-system>.

⁶ Bozin, D., Denault, V., Sullivan, K., Kennon, C., Craddock, L., & Hews, R. (2026). *Understanding the impact of neurodiversity on witness credibility assessment in courts, tribunals and commissions*. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2026.2663445>.

⁷ Bozin, D., K. A. Sullivan, V. Denault, C. Kennon, L. Craddock, and R. Hews. 2026. “Judicial Perspectives on Neurodiversity in Queensland Courts, Tribunals and Commissions: Experiences With Disclosure and Witness Credibility.” *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 1– 12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.70102>.

⁸ <https://lawcouncil.au/files/web-pdf/Justice%20Project/Final%20Report/People%20with%20Disability%20%28Part%201%29.pdf>.

Queensland Court webpage update

Lastly, the courts and tribunal websites should provide clear and comprehensive information on accessibility and disability supports available at each location. For example, information could include whether a courthouse has stairs, the availability of lifts, and any requirements for accessing those lifts (such as contacting a specific number to obtain access). Providing maps that identify key facilities including lifts, courtrooms, and accessible toilets would further support court users to plan their attendance and what to expect.

The Society notes the recent upgrade to the Queensland Courts website. While improvements to the website are welcomed, the upgrade was not foreshadowed with users or key stakeholders to provide input on accessibility related design and functionality improvements.

Given the central role online information plays in enabling court users with disability to understand, request and navigate adjustments, we recommend the courts revisit the upgrade to ensure accessibility features are prominently and centrally embedded. This should include clear pathways to information about adjustments, communication supports, accessible formats, and contact points for assistance, consistent with the intent of Recommendation 8.11 and contemporary accessibility standards.

The Society remains available for further consultation on these issues. If you have any queries regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact our Legal Policy team via policy@qls.com.au or by phone on [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully



Peter Jolly
President