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Tēnā koutou

Budget 2026

I am writing to share this Budget 2026 update with you, as it includes initiatives that I believe will be of interest to the legal profession.

Rotorua courthouses

As outlined in yesterday's pre-Budget announcement in Rotorua, the Government is contributing \$100 million towards the construction of a new Rotorua Law Courts building for the High Court, District Court and Coroners Court, and a new Māori Land Court building.

Planning and design are already underway, with the Law Courts building set to be equipped with two new jury-enabled courtrooms, an additional non-jury custodial courtroom, and an additional non-custodial multi-jurisdictional courtroom.

Demolition at the new Pukuatua St site is expected to start this year, with construction of the new facility beginning in 2027. Once the Law Courts building is operational in mid-2030, the Tutanekai St site will be cleared to make way for the new Māori Land Court to be built in its place.

Legal aid

The Government is investing a further \$30.28m in 2026/27 in legal aid to ensure people who cannot afford a lawyer are represented in court, while pursuing a wider programme of work to ensure the scheme is accessible and affordable.

In response to the 2025 Triennial Legal Aid Review, the Ministry has established the Accessible and Affordable Justice Programme to work with the profession, Justice Sector agencies and the Judiciary to address the drivers of the significant cost increases in recent years and consider changes to legal aid settings.

Court and coroner-related costs – demand-driven cost pressures

\$12.154m in additional funding has been provided to meet immediate cost pressures for services critical to court and coroner services.

It will fund professional and administrative services to ensure court users receive appropriate support and representation, and the judiciary has sufficient information to proceed with cases through the likes of specialist reports and other court-ordered services, such as:

- specialist reports for psychological, medical or background information
- professional services appointed by Family Court judges, such as court-appointed counsel (e.g. lawyer for child and lawyer to assist the court) and specialist report writers
- post-mortems directed by a coroner
- non-violence programmes for respondents to a protection order and offenders in family violence cases who have pleaded guilty
- safety programmes for people (adults and children) protected by a protection order.

The Ministry will progress work on ensuring these services are financially sustainable into the future through the Accessible and Affordable Justice Programme.

Offender levy

The offender levy is being raised from \$50 to \$100. The levy has not been increased since it was first introduced in 2010 and the additional revenue will offset some of the Crown's contribution to services for victims of crime, increasing offenders' contribution to addressing the harm they have caused to victims.

Planning Tribunal

\$46.331m over four years has been allocated to the establishment and ongoing operation of a Planning Tribunal, which is intended to provide a faster, more accessible and lower-cost way to resolve disputes about planning decisions and consent conditions.

The tribunal is part of a major overhaul of the country's planning system announced in December 2025.

Conclusion

We look forward to working with you as the Accessible and Affordable Justice Programme develops and you can expect to hear more on that soon.

Nāku noa, nā



Andrew Kibblewhite

Pou Whakarae mō te Ture
Secretary for Justice