

31 May 2024

S Smith
fyi-request-26294-993dc5ee@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: OIA 111909

Tēnā koe S Smith

Official Information Act request: Travel disbursements

Thank you for your email of 3 May 2024 to the Ministry of Justice in which you requested further information following your previous request (111056).

Your request was as follows:

Given that the approximately \$72,000 in travel disbursements identified would appear to have been paid in direct contravention of the Legal Aid Grants Handbook, could you please provide the basis for the travel disbursements being paid?

I am concerned that the five Whangarei-based PAL 1 providers identified have been fraudulently invoicing the Legal Services Agency.

In response to your request, the information what was provided to you in response to OIA 111056 was summarised from an operational database which includes all legal aid records, applications for legal aid, invoices, correspondence, requests for additional funding, and client records. We cannot confirm whether any amounts have been claimed or paid in error without a detailed examination of individual invoices and payment decisions. Therefore, your request has been refused under section 18(g) of the OIA, as the information is not held by the department or others. This refusal does not imply acceptance of any claims of fraudulent payments.

The Ministry aims to audit all legal aid providers at least once every five years. The audit programme enables the Ministry to review the quality and value of the service provided to legally aided clients. It ensures that everyone accessing legal aid services is receiving a consistent level of service. Legal Aid Services has audit processes that include invoice reviews. Where an audit finds amounts that have been claimed in error, any overpayment can be deducted from future payments due to the provider.

If you require any further information, please contact Media & Social Media Manager Joe Locke at media@justice.govt.nz.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website at: justice.govt.nz/about/official-information-act-requests/oia-responses/.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act. The Office of the Ombudsman may be contacted by email to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phone on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Carroll'.

Louisa Carroll
Acting Group Manager, National Services Delivery