

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Leader of the House
Minister for Health
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ambulance Services



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QUESTIONS FOR PESUTTO ABOUT HIS DONOR-FUNDED LEGAL DEFENCE

After revelations his legal fees are being paid for by former Liberal Premiers, wealthy donors and even members of his own staff, John Pesutto must come clean with Victorians about the extent of his fundraising drive in his defamation case with Liberal Party member Moira Deeming.

In November 2023 Mr Pesutto said that he would “not be asking the (Liberal) Party to cover any legal fees”. Now it’s been reported that several people, including former Premiers Jeff Kennett, Ted Baillieu and Denis Napthine have already made donations towards his million-dollar legal defence – which his own party has refused to pay for.

It's expected that this list will grow in the coming months – but it won't include former Liberal leaders Matthew Guy and Michael O'Brien, who have both refused to donate to Mr Pesutto.

This is not the first time that the Liberal Party has been associated with donations scandals. When Mr Guy was the Liberal Party leader, his Chief of Staff was accused of seeking payments from a private donor to supplement his income.

In 2011 it was revealed that David Davis had failed to immediately disclose to the Victorian Parliament donations he received from Liberal Party supporters to pay his legal fees.

These revelations have left important questions unanswered, including:

- Who has Mr Pesutto, or his taxpayer funded staff, asked to donate to his million-dollar legal defence?
- Has Mr Pesutto, or his taxpayer funded staff, asked others to speak to people on his behalf and solicit donations for his million-dollar legal defence? If so, who?
- What steps has Mr Pesutto put in place to ensure there is no conflict of interest?
- What has Mr Pesutto promised donors in return for their money?
- Will Mr Pesutto disclose the names of business owners who donate using ABNs like Bau Agency Pty Ltd Burwood?
- Who has been paying for the expensive legal costs Mr Pesutto has incurred so far?
- Under the *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978*, Victorian Members of Parliament are required to declare other sources of income, beneficial interests and debts as soon as possible – will Mr Pesutto commit to updating the Clerks in Parliament about these donations in real time?
- Why is Mr Pesutto not being upfront with Victorians and disclosing the names of those who have donated in real time?
- A member of Mr Pesutto's staff has donated his million-dollar legal defence – has Mr Pesutto asked members of his staff to donate?
- Why won't Mr Pesutto disclose the amounts that people donate to fund his million-dollar legal defence?

Victorians deserve the truth.

Quotes attributable to Leader of the House Mary Anne-Thomas

“Mr Pesutto has shown once again that he cannot be trusted – he must immediately come clean with Victorians and explain why his million dollar legal defence, funded by private donors, is not a significant conflict of interest.”

“If Mr Pesutto isn't trusted by his own party, how can he expect to be trusted by Victorians?”

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