

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW BUDGET 2018: FUNDING SUPPORT FOR COURTS & LEGAL CENTRES

Small businesses and some of the State's most vulnerable people will benefit from increased support for Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and measures to streamline civil justice processes.

As part of a \$1.2 billion spending on the effective and efficient resolution of legal disputes and proceedings, the NSW Budget 2018 delivers more than \$22 million over four years to implement an ambitious Civil Justice Strategy and provide additional funding and financial certainty for Community Legal Centres.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the strategy will support small businesses and mums and dads with their day-to-day legal problems such as debt, housing and consumer disputes. Funding for CLCs will also increase support for vulnerable NSW residents experiencing problems from domestic and family violence to child abuse.

"Around 85 per cent of all legal problems are civil and nearly three million people in NSW experience a legal problem every year. The NSW Government's investment will make it easier for people and businesses to resolve legal issues quickly, saving time, money and stress," said Mr Speakman.

Other justice budget highlights include:

- \$29.5 million for reforms to encourage early guilty pleas in appropriate cases, plus an additional \$10 million for the Legal Aid Commission, to help clear the District Court backlog, minimise court delays and reduce stress for victims;
- \$27.1 million for ongoing measures to cut the backlog of criminal trials in the District Court which have included the appointments of five additional judges, two public defenders and extra sitting days;
- \$4 million over four years to allow for unlimited counselling for victims of child sexual and physical abuse; and

- \$5.5 million to continue the Counter Terrorism Plan in NSW courthouses, including an extension of 40 temporary Sheriff's Officers and Intelligence and Tactical Training Officers.

The Budget will also provide an additional \$2.7 million over three years to the Youth Koori Court to enable the program which currently operates in Parramatta to be expanded to Surry Hills Children's Court.

A recent evaluation by Western Sydney University found the Youth Koori Court was an effective and culturally appropriate way of addressing issues that cause many young Indigenous people to enter the criminal justice system.

The additional \$10 million allocated to the Legal Aid Commission in relation to the early appropriate guilty pleas reforms will be used to fund legal representation costs, and follows representations from the NSW Bar Association and NSW Law Society. The allocation of these funds will be determined once the review of legal aid fees is complete.

“Only the NSW Liberals & Nationals strong economic management provides opportunities for NSW families and small business to get ahead. These smart initiatives that will make justice more efficient and accessible, help disadvantaged people and keep communities safe,” said Treasurer Dominic Perrottet.

MEDIA: Damien Smith | 0417 788 947
Bryce O'Connor | 0408 549 415