

# MEDIA RELEASE

## **ADDITIONAL LOCAL COURT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FUNDING WELCOMED BUT GOVERNMENT NEGLECTS WALAMA COURT AND ICE INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS**



NEW SOUTH WALES  
BAR ASSOCIATION

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The President of the New South Wales Bar Association Michael McHugh SC has today welcomed the State Government's budget announcement of additional funding for eight new Local Court magistrates and support services for victims, but cautioned that other key priorities for the NSW Justice system have been ignored.

"The Local Court is the busiest jurisdiction in the nation and has been placed under significant strain during the pandemic. The additional resources announced today will assist in dealing with the extraordinary workload of the Court which will speed up time to justice for all participants in the system and enhance access to justice in criminal and civil matters" said Mr McHugh.

The Association also welcomes the Government's commitment to provide an extra \$60 million over two years for frontline domestic and sexual violence services across the State to support victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

"However the Government has again failed to fund the establishment of the Walama Court, a specialist sentencing court for Indigenous offenders. The establishment of a specific Indigenous sentencing court has been recommended by a number of high level inquiries, including the Australian Law Reform Commission Pathways to Justice report into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the January 2020 Special Commission of Inquiry into crystal methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type stimulants (the Ice Inquiry) and the recent NSW Parliament Select Committee on the High Level of First Nations People in Custody and Oversight and Review of Deaths in Custody, as an essential element in addressing the unacceptably high rates of Indigenous imprisonment in this country." Mr McHugh said.

While First Nations people represent 3% of the population in NSW, they represent 40% of adults refused bail in NSW and 25% of the prison population. "The NSW Government has committed to, by 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent under target 10 of the National Closing the Gap agreement. Yet this budget appears to contain no specific announcement to address this target and the Government has again overlooked the opportunity to address this shameful state of affairs" Mr McHugh said.

"It is also of significant concern that the Government has still not responded to the findings of the 2020 Ice Inquiry, which made key recommendations regarding diversionary schemes regarding personal use of prohibited drugs" Mr McHugh said.

“These are crucial initiatives which would bring harm reduction principles into the way our Justice system deals with drug users, rather than recycle punitive approaches which have demonstrably failed to address the problem and we look forward to further discussions on their implementation” Mr McHugh said.

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