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Attorney General

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MEDIA RELEASE

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STATEWIDE JUSTICE ADVOCACY FOR PEOPLE WITH COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

One of the State's most experienced advocacy organisations for people with an intellectual disability will operate a new \$10 million service funded by the NSW Government to protect the rights of people with cognitive impairment who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Attorney General Mark Speakman and Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services Gareth Ward today announced the Intellectual Disability Rights Service will deliver the Justice Advocacy Service across NSW over the next two years.

"The Justice Advocacy Service (JAS) will provide free support to victims, witnesses and defendants with cognitive impairment as well as free legal advice to those in custody who have cognitive impairment," Mr Speakman said.

Mr Speakman said people with cognitive impairment are overrepresented in NSW courts and prisons, and helping them to better understand their rights and responsibilities could ultimately reduce reoffending.

"For example, the JAS specialists will carefully explain conditions of bail and Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders to people with cognitive impairment to minimise inadvertent breaches of orders."

Mr Ward said the Intellectual Disability Rights Service had a proven record of providing advocacy and support for some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

"The Intellectual Disability Rights Service has been helping people with cognitive impairment in contact with the criminal justice system for 15 years and will now be able to reach a broader range of people in NSW, including in rural, regional and remote communities," Mr Ward said.

"Equal and fair access to justice is a hallmark of a civilised society and it's critical that all people are heard and understood when they are reporting a crime, attending a legal appointment, giving police statements or providing evidence in court."

A cognitive impairment includes intellectual disability, borderline intellectual functioning, dementia, acquired brain injury, drug or alcohol related brain damage, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and autism spectrum disorder.

The NSW Government's funding will enable the Justice Advocacy Service to operate from 1 July 2019.

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