



MEDIA RELEASE

Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
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IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FINES IN NSW

The NSW Government will examine ways of making the payment of fines more manageable for people on low incomes, after the release of a report by the Sentencing Council, Attorney General John Hatzistergos said today.

“The Report, *Effectiveness of Fines as a Sentencing Option*, confirms that, for the most part, penalty notices and court fines are a cost effective, prompt and appropriate means of punishing offenders.

“But the Council has also highlighted areas where enforcement can be improved, particularly in relation to disadvantaged people.

“The Government has set up an Interagency Working Group with key agencies including Attorney Generals, Roads and Traffic Authority, NSW Police, Office of State Revenue and Transport to develop a number of strategies to improve the enforcement system.

The Office of State Revenue has already implemented some of the recommendations including:

- Making payment of fines easier by allowing people to pay their penalty notices over a number of transactions, rather than in a single lump, including deductions from Centrelink benefits
- Making guidelines for reviewing decisions to issue a penalty notice publicly available. These guidelines also provide the basis for consistent decision making for all NSW authorities empowered to issue penalty notices.

Other changes being considered by the Interagency Working Group include:

- Allowing the Office of State Revenue and law enforcement officers to issue and record formal cautions if issuing a ticket is not the right response;
- Expanding the Hardship Review Board’s responsibilities in reviewing State Debt Recovery Office decisions
- Looking after vulnerable people, particularly those with a mental illness or intellectual disability
- Allowing alternative Court orders for vulnerable people, including treatment orders under the *Mental Health (Criminal Procedure) Act 1990*, intervention programs such as the Magistrates’ Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) for

offenders with drug problems, and requirements to complete financial counselling.

Mr Hatzistergos said there were opportunities to further refine the changes so vulnerable people didn't get caught in a vicious cycle of secondary offending such as someone caught driving while their licence was suspended.

"While it's important the system deals rigorously with people who refuse to pay fines, vulnerable people may at times need to be dealt with a little differently.

"These proposals will help reduce re-offending rates without drawing disadvantaged people into the justice system."

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