



MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW OPTION HELPS THE DISADVANTAGED PAY COURT FINES

Disadvantaged people are now able to pay off NSW court fines by having the money gradually deducted from their Centrelink payments, NSW Attorney General John Hatzistergos announced today.

“Failure to pay court fines can result in serious consequences such as the cancellation of a driver’s license, personal property seizure or additional fees, so it is important that disadvantaged people are given manageable payment options,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

This option means recipients of Centrelink payments are able to have an agreed amount deducted from their welfare benefits each fortnight until the debt is cleared. Generally, people have 28 days to pay court fines.

Mr Hatzistergos said the funds are deducted using Centrelink’s free Centrepay service, which is often used by people receiving government benefits to manage the payment of their rent, telephone, electricity and gas bills.

“No one will be obliged to use Centrepay and welfare recipients will still be able to pay court fines all at once if they prefer,” he said.

Mr Hatzistergos said the NSW Government had also introduced a separate scheme – called Work and Development Orders - that allows homeless, mentally ill or people experiencing acute financial hardship to pay off fines by doing charity work or treatment programs.

He said organisations such as charities, youth services, drug and alcohol services, neighbourhood centres and mental health service providers are taking part.

“The Work and Development Orders scheme is strongly backed by many of the state’s key charity groups including The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society and Youth Off the Streets,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“This program introduced last year aims to address a phenomenon known as ‘secondary offending’, which occurs when disadvantaged people can’t pay their fines and descend deeper into the criminal justice system.

“Both these initiatives will help ensure that disadvantaged people still have enough money for food, clothing and shelter when they are paying off a court fine.”

Since January 19, all notices of penalties issued by NSW courts have included a Centrepay application form, with more than 160 applications processed to date. The forms are also available at courthouses across the state and online at: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au