



MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW SENTENCE OPTION FOR NEWCASTLE COURTS: CRIMINALS TO COME FACE-TO-FACE WITH THEIR VICTIMS

Criminals could come face-to-face with their victims as part of a new option to become available to courts in the Hunter later this year, NSW Attorney General John Hatzistergos announced today.

“This pre-sentence option can require offenders to come face to face with the victims of their crimes and confront the consequences of their criminal behaviour,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“Importantly, it also gives victims of crime and their families a role in the process of justice.”

Mr Hatzistergos said the Forum Sentencing program is an innovative court program that gives victims a direct role in how offenders are punished.

“As part of the program, offenders attend a forum with their victim, a police officer and a facilitator to discuss the impact of their crime and agree to an intervention plan,” he said.

“Offenders can then be ordered to apologise, pay compensation, perform community work, or undertake rehabilitative treatment as part of an Intervention Plan approved by a court in sentencing.”

Minister for the Hunter and Member for Newcastle, Jodi McKay, said \$5.5 million has been allocated in this year’s budget for the expansion of Forum Sentencing including its rollout in Hunter courts by the end of the year.

“The NSW Government is supporting the establishment of Forum Sentencing in Newcastle, Broadmeadow, Belmont and Toronto courts,” Ms McKay said.

“This will empower courts in the Hunter to give victims of crime a greater say in how offenders are punished.

“It will also see more perpetrators of crime face up to the damage they have caused and the impact their crimes have had on the community.

“By making criminals understand the consequences of their crimes, we can help them make positive choices and turn away from a life of crime.”

This year’s budget allocation includes \$5.5 million to fund the expansion of Forum Sentencing to an additional 25 courts over the next year including courts in the Hunter. The Forum Sentencing Program is currently available at 13 locations around NSW.

Member for Swansea, Robert Coombs said the Hunter will become the next region to have access to this innovative justice delivery program including referrals from Belmont Local Court.

“I have been a strong supporter of this innovative justice program and I am pleased to be able to deliver it for the local community,” Mr Coombs said.

“Forum Sentencing has had an enormous amount of backing, with research from the NSW Bureau of Statistics Crime and Research finding high levels of support among victims.”

As part of the program, courts can refer eligible offenders to Forum Sentencing and then formally sentence them after the forum has taken place. Serious offenders - such as those guilty of sexual offences - are specifically excluded.