

MEDIA RELEASE

**Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
Minister for Citizenship
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Laws passed to increase pay and make jury service easier for rural and regional centres

Despite protests from the Opposition, NSW Parliament last night passed laws that broaden the jury pool and make jury service easier in rural and regional centres.

“The news laws, opposed by Liberals and Nationals, broaden the jury pool to include previously exempt professions such as lawyers and retired judges, increase jury allowances, and strengthen workplace protections for employees who serve,” NSW Attorney General, John Hatzistergos said.

“One of the requirements of jury service is that jurors selected to serve are not familiar with individuals involved in the case – something that can become difficult to achieve if you are selecting jurors from a community where people know each other well.”

“By broadening the jury pool these laws will enable more people to fulfil their civic duty by serving on a jury, and reduce the need for trials to be transferred to larger centres or delayed.”

Mr Hatzistergos said that the new laws have reduced the number of groups who are either ineligible or have a right to exemption.

Most lawyers will now be eligible for jury duty, but not those working in the criminal justice system. In addition, retired police officers and judicial officers will be eligible to serve three years after they leave their job.

A number of other groups will also no longer be subject to a “blanket exemption” including people aged over 70, pregnant women, carers of a person who is sick, infirm or disabled, and a person who resides more than 56 Kilometres from the court.

Under the changes, a person can claim an exemption for jury service if they can show ‘good cause’ – which could be that they have a disability, there is a conflict of interest that may result in a lack of impartiality, or that serving would cause them undue hardship.

Mr Hatzistergos said that it is a shame that the NSW Liberal and National parties sought to dilute laws that will make sure criminal trials can continue in small regional centres, where it is convenient for witnesses and others involved in the trial.

“The Liberals and Nationals have got it wrong once again. Not only are they out of touch with community views about the need to widen the jury pool, but they are also out of step with the views of the legal profession. The Law Society and the Bar Association have strongly backed the move to include lawyers in the jury pool.”

Mr Hatzistergos also said changes to the jury allowance system will make it easier for employed jurors to serve on longer trials. This will be supported by stronger workplace protections for people called for jury service.

“Changes to the allowance system will boost the daily rate from \$100 to \$225 after 10 days, when jurors no longer have to be paid by their employers, for jurors who are employed.”

“Corporations who sack or unfairly discriminate against employees could be fined up to \$22,000, while individual employers will face fines of up to \$5,500. New laws will also prevent employers forcing employees to take leave, or to work outside court sitting times, while serving on a jury.”