



MEDIA RELEASE

Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
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PACIFIC ISLAND ELDERS TO HELP BRING OFFENDERS TO JUSTICE

NSW Attorney General John Hatzistergos today announced a new court program for Campbelltown that will give Pacific Island and Maori Elders a role in sentencing offenders from their community.

“Pacific Island and Maori Elders are highly respected within their communities and their involvement in the criminal justice process could help steer offenders back onto the right path,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

Mr Hatzistergos said the Pacific Elders program would build on the success of Forum Sentencing, which is an innovative court program that forces offenders to confront their victims and make amends.

“This new program will enable Pacific Island and Maori Elders to participate in Forum Sentencing, so in addition to confronting their victim, offenders must also answer to their community”, he said.

“Offenders will be made to face up to what they’ve done by listening to what their victims have to say and then correcting their wrongs.

“Elders join the victim to develop an intervention plan for the offender, which could include an apology, payment of compensation, community service work or drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

“A Magistrate may then take the plan into account when imposing a sentence. Offenders who fail to complete the program run the risk of being sent to jail.”

Mr Hatzistergos said Elders would also be able to participate in Youth Justice Conferencing, which is a similar restorative justice program for young offenders.

Serious offenders, such as those guilty of serious personal violence and sexual offences, are excluded from both programs.

Mr Hatzistergos said the Pacific Elders program would also allow Magistrates to refer cases dealt with through ordinary court processes to Elders for advice on sentencing.

“An Elder may also be present in court for sentencing, with a probation and parole officer assisting them, to respond to any questions from the Magistrate.

“This will enable the Magistrate to consider the community’s perspective on whether the offender acknowledges the impact of their offence on victims and their community.”

Mr Hatzistergos said the Elders program would help to break down barriers between Pacific Island and Maori communities and the justice system.

“I would like to commend Campbelltown Police and the Campbelltown Magistrate for helping to develop this regionally specific program,” he said.