



MEDIA RELEASE

**Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
Minister for Industrial Relations**

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

JUSTICE EXPERTS TO LEAD PUBLIC FORUMS ON CRIME AND SENTENCING

NSW residents will soon have the chance to hear first-hand, expert accounts of life in the criminal justice system to help those interested better understand our court and sentencing system.

In his address to the 40th Anniversary Symposium of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) today, Attorney General John Hatzistergos announced a series of sentencing information sessions will be held across the state from April.

"Many people are not aware NSW has the strongest sentencing regime in the country," Mr Hatzistergos said.

"However, research by BOCSAR has shown that over the last 15 years, the use of imprisonment as a punishment has increased for most offences and prison terms are generally getting longer.

"Perceptions of crime and justice are often shaped without people hearing the full details of a case.

"The Rees Government is committed to raising greater awareness of crime and sentencing rates to break down some of the existing misconceptions."

A study released by BOCSAR and the NSW Sentencing Council in August found a large proportion of people were mistaken in their views about crime rates, the proportion of violent crime and the proportion of offenders convicted and imprisoned.

"Those people who had the worst knowledge of the criminal justice system also had the least confidence in the system," Mr Hatzistergos said.

BOCSAR found a high proportion of people wanted to know more about the court system and sentencing and this included people who already had a high level of knowledge.

The first sentencing information forum, to be led by Chairman of the NSW Parole Board and former NSW Chief Magistrate Ian Pike AM would be held in Parramatta on 7 April, with further forums to follow.

A panel including an expert from BOCSAR and Howard Brown from the Victims of Crime Assistance League, will explain sentencing and provide information about crime, court processes and support services for victims.

Mr Hatzistergos congratulated BOCSAR on its ongoing success.

“In addition to providing important statistical information, BOCSAR’s research has had a profound impact on law and policy in this state, influencing the law in areas such as random breath testing, sexual assault, domestic violence and crime prevention,” he said.

Media contact: Lyndell Coutts 0407 412 269