



MEDIA RELEASE

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

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DRUG COURT WORKING TO BREAK DRUG-CRIME CYCLE

NSW Attorney General John Hatzistergos welcomed the findings of two reports released today, which show the Parramatta Drug Court is an effective alternative to prison for drug dependent offenders.

Mr Hatzistergos said the findings by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) and the Centre for Health Economics Research and Evaluation (CHERE) were very encouraging and paved the way for the NSW Government to consider the potential for expanding the program's reach.

The program, which runs for a minimum of 12 months, works to break the drug-crime cycle and was the first Drug Court created in Australia when it began in 1999.

In its second evaluation of the Drug Court, BOCSAR found that participants accepted into the program were:

- 17 per cent less likely to be reconvicted for any offence;
- 30 per cent less likely to be reconvicted for a violent offence; and
- 38 per cent less likely to be reconvicted for a drug offence.

In addition, the CHERE report concluded the program was less costly than conventional prison and produced better outcomes for participants.

"These results show the program is more cost-effective than prison in reducing re-offending rates among offenders of drug related crimes," Mr Hatzistergos said.

"In light of these findings, the NSW Government will consult with the Drug Court and other government agencies to investigate expanding the Court's reach."

Mr Hatzistergos and the Member for Parramatta, Tanya Gadiel, today attended the graduation of five program participants at a ceremony held at the Sydney West Trial Courts in Parramatta.

Congratulating the graduates on the commitment they demonstrated during the course of the program, they acknowledged the hard work they have undertaken to beat their habits and make a positive contribution to society.

"With the support of their families and friends, each participant has undergone an intensive drug treatment and rehabilitation program that will give them the skills to re-integrate into society, away from a life of crime," Mr Hatzistergos said.

"When offenders enter the Drug Court, they are often entrenched in a life of drug-related crime and have a jail sentence hanging over their heads.

“The program works by helping to eliminate drug dependency among participants. It also helps offenders to address other causes of crime, such as homelessness and mental health issues to equip them with the skills to re-integrate into society and make long-term changes to their lives.”

Ms Gadiel said the participants who graduated today are to be commended for addressing their problems.

“Each individual is leaving the court today with valuable life and job skills. I wish them every success for the future.”

Throughout the program, participants must undergo regular drug testing, engage in education and rehabilitation courses and regularly report to the court on their progress.

A purpose-built Drug Court registry is currently being created at Parramatta Courthouse as part of the building’s \$13 million upgrade, due for completion in July 2009.

Media Inquiries: Lyndell Coutts 0407 412 269