



MEDIA RELEASE

Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
Minister for Industrial Relations

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SECURITY PROCEDURES BOOSTED TO PROTECT JUDGES

Attorney General John Hatzistergos announced today that security procedures in courthouses will be revamped as new figures reveal that threats against judges have doubled in the past financial year.

“The safety and wellbeing of judges and magistrates is paramount to the integrity of the justice system,” said Mr Hatzistergos.

“Sheriff’s officers must be adequately equipped and empowered to ensure they can protect judges and members of the public who frequent NSW courthouses.”

Mr Hatzistergos said the disturbing jump in threats against judges, which went from 10 to 20 in the last financial year, coincided with a rise in the average monthly number of courthouse security incidents in NSW from 220 to 300.

- In September last year a defendant made a threat to kill the presiding magistrate. The 28-year-old man said he was going to “slit the throat” of the magistrate and then kill himself. Sheriffs’ officers were alerted and the matter involving the man was heard by another magistrate.
- In October last year a magistrate received a letter contained a newspaper clipping about a case he was involved in. Handwriting on the clipping was obscene and threatening.

Mr Hatzistergos said standard operating procedures, contained in the Sheriff’s Office Manual, would be updated to reflect new legislation and emerging threats.

“The operating procedures will be updated to improve judicial officer security, intelligence gathering, incident reporting and handling of high risk security matters,” said Mr Hatzistergos.

“I am concerned that a number of matters involving high profile defendants have attracted persons to courthouses who have behaved anti-socially and shown disrespect for the judicial process.”

Mr Hatzistergos said sheriffs already carried baton, pepper spray and handcuffs, and had the power to confiscate prohibited items, such as weapons, give directions, make arrests and use reasonable force.

“Major courthouses now have metal detectors located inside their entrances, and mobile security screening equipment can be deployed to any courthouse in NSW in anticipation of a high risk matter.”

He said statutory reviews of both the Sheriff’s Act and the Court Security Act will be conducted next year.

“As well as updating operating procedures, next year the powers of sheriffs will be examined as part of the statutory reviews of the relevant acts.”