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NSW TO EXPAND COURT NETWORK AND REDUCE RECIDIVISM

The NSW Liberals and Nationals Government will invest \$46 million in programs to reduce re-offending and \$78 million to build new courts and improve existing facilities, Attorney General Greg Smith SC announced today.

Mr Smith said the 2011-12 Budget provided for the creation of a new Drug Court, specialist drug rehabilitation correctional facilities and education and training programs for inmates.

There is funding to reduce the state's juvenile remand population, with more than \$11 million set aside over four years for programs which will assist young people with their bail applications and help them meet bail conditions.

"A significant number of young people are held in custody simply because they have no accommodation or support in the community to help them comply with bail," Mr Smith said.

"Juvenile Justice will increase the number of Court Intake and Bail Support staff across the State, helping young people stay out of trouble and out of detention."

The Government will invest a further \$7 million over four years to house young people in Broken Hill under the Remote Remand Model.

"This funding will provide accommodation in a secure Juvenile Justice Centre at Broken Hill. It will allow young people to stay closer to their families, community and support systems," Mr Smith said.

The Forum Sentencing program will receive \$9 million as it expands to Cessnock, Lismore, Penrith, Port Macquarie, Tamworth, Wagga and Albury. The program, which gives victims of crime a role in determining an adult offender's sentence, is currently operating at 33 locations across NSW.

Mr Smith said the Government is also examining the potential for greater contestability in the provision of corrective services, as part of a prison reform process currently underway.

In June 2010, prisoner numbers in full time custody had risen to just over 10,400. Within one year this has fallen below 10,000, with the State currently carrying a surplus capacity of approximately 12% in its prison system.

To address this surplus capacity and to align the State's prison system with community needs, Mr Smith said the Berrima, Parramatta and Kirkconnell Correctional Centres would be closed and the inmates relocated to other facilities. As part of this change, a disused section of Parklea correctional centre with 80 beds will re-open.

Mr Smith said the Government would also expand and upgrade the NSW court network.

"The NSW Government will build a \$40 million courthouse and a \$19 million police station in Coffs Harbour, as part of a planned Government Services Precinct for the city," Mr Smith said.

“The new courthouse will be 50 per cent larger than the existing court building and will feature up to five courtrooms, airport-style security and facilities for victims of crime, the legal profession, people with a disability and the general public.”

The Budget also includes \$9 million for construction of a new courthouse at Armidale and \$19 million to upgrade courts at locations including the Downing Centre in Sydney’s CBD, Liverpool, Waverley, Taree and Port Macquarie.

Other highlights of the Budget include:

- almost \$7 million for simplifying and accelerating the electronic filing of court documents, exchange of information between justice agencies and provision of online court services;
- an additional \$5 million to improve the maintenance of court facilities and technology;
- more than \$2 million for a trial of alternative dispute resolution procedures in child protection matters at Bidura Children’s Court;
- more than \$1 million for Legal Aid services to victims of sexual assault seeking to prevent their counselling records being produced as evidence; and
- \$200,000 for research into the needs of victims of crime.

“The NSW Liberals & Nationals Government has delivered a comprehensive and responsible plan to reduce re-offending, assist victims in their recovery and ensure that the NSW court system remains the best in Australia,” Mr Smith said.

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