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MEDIA RELEASE

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DISTRICT COURT PROGRAM REDUCES DELAYS

A program aimed at cutting the District Court backlog is delivering significantly faster case outcomes, according to a new report by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR).

“The spectacular results of the Rolling List Court show what can be achieved with earlier and better management of cases by prosecution and defence agencies,” NSW Attorney General Mark Speakman said.

“Guilty pleas are being entered sooner and in greater numbers, while cases are proceeding to trial faster, reducing stress and uncertainty for victims, witnesses and defendants.”

The Rolling List Court has been operating at Sydney’s Downing Centre for almost three years. BOCSAR’s key findings include:

- guilty pleas have been entered in almost three quarters of Rolling List Court matters (compared with 58 per cent of comparable District Court cases);
- on average, guilty pleas were entered about 150 days after committal in rolling list cases – almost 70 days quicker than in cases not on the rolling list;
- rolling list cases proceeded from committal to trial in around 150 days (40 per cent sooner than other District Court cases); and
- rolling list cases took 28 per cent less time to progress from committal to finalisation (an average of 262 days).

The Rolling List Court assigns a crown prosecutor and senior defence lawyer to a case earlier to ensure charges are appropriate and to narrow the trial issues in dispute. For added cohesion, the same judge presides throughout the proceedings.

While the program is limited to the Sydney District Court, the NSW Government is introducing state-wide reforms that will require early case management of all indictable matters in the Local Court.

Under the Early Appropriate Guilty Pleas reform, police will promptly provide a simplified brief of evidence to the prosecution and defence. A senior prosecutor will certify the appropriate charges and conduct a formal conference with the defence to resolve disputes and encourage early guilty pleas, where appropriate.

“Large sentencing discounts will be off the table for last-minute guilty pleas,” Mr Speakman said.