



**Gladys Berejiklian**

Premier of NSW

**Mark Speakman**

Attorney General

**Pru Goward**

Minister for Family and Community Services

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **CHILDREN'S CHAMPIONS' FUTURE SECURED**

Children and young people involved in sexual abuse cases will receive ongoing support through difficult court proceedings thanks to a major new investment from the NSW Government that will enable a highly-successful pilot program to become permanent.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian, Attorney General Mark Speakman and Minister for Family and Community Services Pru Goward announced today that the NSW Government will invest more than \$28 million in the Child Sexual Offence Evidence Program, which includes 'Children's Champions' to help support young people through the courts process.

The pilot program is being made permanent after a glowing independent assessment by the University of NSW, which showed that it received very strong support from participants, reduced stress for children and resulted in a better quality of evidence from child witnesses.

"NSW is leading the country with this important initiative which delivers support to young victims of sexual abuse and child witnesses," Ms Berejiklian said.

"We know that going to court to give evidence can be a tough experience for children and young people, so I am extremely proud that the NSW Government is investing this funding to make the experience easier."

Mr Speakman said the program is proving vital to ensuring children understand and are understood during the court process.

"Going to court can be stressful and traumatic for anyone, let alone young people. This program ensures that some of the most vulnerable people who come in contact with the justice system get the support they need," Mr Speakman said.

The Child Sexual Offence Evidence Pilot began in Sydney and Newcastle District Courts in March 2016. It provides victims and child witnesses for the prosecution with specialist intermediaries, sometimes known as 'Children's Champions'. It also enables them to have their evidence pre-recorded in advance of a trial.

"Almost 70 matters in the pilot have been finalised and a further 46 were still to be determined at the time of writing the evaluation report. Specialist witness intermediaries have assisted these young people answer questions from police and lawyers, enabling them to provide their best evidence, without affecting the defendant's right to a fair trial," Mr Speakman said.

The funding announced today will ensure the program continues to be delivered in Sydney and Newcastle District Courts until June 2022.

Minister for Family and Community Services Pru Goward said the program is part of the \$127 million package of reforms to deliver the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

“We are supporting government and non-government institutions to better protect children and respond to child sexual abuse,” Ms Goward said.

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