



THE LAW SOCIETY  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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6 October 2009

The Hon. John Hatzistergos, MLC  
Attorney General for NSW  
Level 33, Governor Macquarie Tower  
1 Farrer Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Attorney General,

**Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment Program**

The Law Society's Criminal Law (Committee) strongly supports the Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment (MERIT) program as an effective pre-sentence diversionary program. The Committee is of the view that MERIT should be rolled out to all of regional NSW and expanded to cater for defendants with alcohol abuse problems.

To increase awareness of the program amongst practitioners not regularly appearing for criminal defendants in the Local Court, an article on MERIT was published in the September issue of the *Law Society Journal*.

The recent research by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has shown that MERIT is having great success in reducing rates of reoffending. The Auditor-General also evaluated MERIT and recommended the expansion of the program to defendants with alcohol abuse problems.

The Committee wholeheartedly supports your announcement that the Government is considering implementing the Auditor-General's recommendation.

To expand MERIT to regional areas of NSW and to include defendants with alcohol problems will require a massive injection of resources. The Committee considers that the demonstrated success of MERIT in reducing recidivist behaviour, and the associated benefits this creates for the community, justifies the allocation of substantial resources to the program.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Catanzariti  
President

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