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Legal Profession Calls on Police Minister to Address Strip Searches As New Figures Reveal Almost 300 Children Have Been Strip Searched

Prominent members of the legal profession, including former NSW Director of Public Prosecutions Nicholas Cowdery QC and former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Hon Elizabeth Evatt AC, have signed an [open letter](#) to the NSW Police Minister outlining the harmful impacts of strip searches. The letter coincides with the release of new data showing the majority of police strip searches undertaken in New South Wales are being conducted on young people, including children as young as ten.

The new figures – obtained by Redfern Legal Centre via access to information laws – reveal that for a two-year period between the financial years 2016-17 and 2017-18, 296 children were strip searched. Four thousand and eleven young people aged 18 to 25 were strip searched, accounting for forty-one per cent of searches conducted across the state. The youngest person strip searched was aged 10 and the oldest aged 82 years.

The figures also show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 10 per cent of people who were strip searched, while representing less than 3 per cent of the total New South Wales population.

Redfern Legal Centre, who instigated the open letter, says this new data must be acted upon immediately.

Samantha Lee, Head of the Police Accountability Practice at Redfern Legal Centre, said: “This is the only law in Australia that allows a police officer to order a child as young as ten to take off all their clothes and stand naked while their body is inspected. The law flies in the face of child protection and harm minimisation principles. It is an antiquated, harmful and abusive practice that needs to stop.”

“Being subjected to a strip search is a highly traumatic experience. It is a harmful memory trigger for children, young people and adults who have been subjected to sexual assault, sexual abuse, or other forms of violence. The fact that this practice is being carried out with such frequency is both highly disturbing and completely unnecessary.”

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) President Kerry Weste said: “Strip-searches are highly invasive and can be humiliating, degrading and a significant breach of human rights to liberty, privacy and dignity.”

Over the same two-year period, the police station with the highest number of recorded strip searches was Auburn (816), followed closely by Sydney City PAC (815), Surry Hills PS (784), Eastern Beaches (251), Lake Illawarra (246), Nowra (256), Taree (304), Wollongong (219).

Redfern Legal Centre also obtained a suburb by suburb breakdown of strip searches. The majority of searches were conducted at Sydney Olympic Park, Sydney and Moore Park, while in regional areas, Taree and Nowra stood out as strip search hot spots.

The ‘objects found’ during a strip search for the period (2016-17 to 2017-18) include, inter alia: bicycle, stamp/coin collection, office equipment, sport equipment, clothing, drugs, tobacco, prohibited article, gardening equipment, firearm, knife, liquor and book.

In November last year, Redfern Legal Centre launched the ‘Safe and Sound’ campaign (www.safeandsound.org.au). The campaign aims to change strip search laws in New South Wales to ensure better safeguards for members of the public and improved guidance for police.

RLC police powers solicitor, Samatha Lee is available for interview. Contact Finn O’Keefe, RLC Communications Manager: 0402 362 749 | 02 9698 7277 | finn@rlc.org.au. Read the open letter and suburb breakdown of strip search data here: <http://bit.ly/ssopenletter>