

Redfern Legal Centre

Media Release



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We need fewer fines and more compassion in response to COVID police hits in south-western Sydney

Redfern Legal Centre has cautioned against the overuse of fines in south-western Sydney to ensure compliance with public health orders.

Samantha Lee, solicitor in the police accountability practice at Redfern Legal Centre states, "Targeting communities in south-western Sydney with more police and more fines seems disproportionate and unjust. All communities need equal access to health information, resources and support to get through this difficult time. Increasing penalties to lower economic areas is not the answer."

Recent figures obtained by Redfern Legal Centre from Revenue NSW under freedom of information laws revealed that fewer than a quarter of the 1854 fines police issued in 14 months since they were introduced have been paid in full.

The figures show NSW Police issued the fines between January 1, 2020, and February 24 this year, including to children. The data reveals 22 per cent of the fines — about \$415,000 of the total \$1,854,000 owing — had been paid in full.

"In just over 15 months the New South Wales public health orders for gathering have changed over thirty times. The current laws tell people they can't leave their house without a reasonable excuse, but allow people to go buy power tools at Bunnings. People are confused, exhausted and just trying to get by."

Redfern Legal Centre solicitor Samantha Lee said many people, including those who had lost their jobs during the pandemic or who were on Centrelink benefits, were unable to pay the \$1000 fines, which are not means-tested. She said the process of applying for leniency due to financial hardship was complex.

"The fines are among the largest on-the-spot fines police can issue and the largest that can be issued to a child aged 10 to 18," Ms Lee said.

Redfern Legal Centre offers a free legal advice service about appeal and payment options for people in NSW who have been issued with a COVID fine.

Samantha Lee, RLC Police Accountability Solicitor is available for interview. Contact Finn O'Keefe, RLC Communications Manager: 0424 548 019 | media@rlc.org.au.