

MEDIA RELEASE

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Redfern Legal Centre calls for immediate action on strip searches, following NSW Police reported admission that strip search powers are being breached

Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) welcomes the reported admission by NSW Police Force that officers have potentially breached strip search powers, saying that updating educational and training resources is not good enough, and calling for immediate action to amend strip search laws.

Samantha Lee, a solicitor who heads up the Police Accountability legal practice at Redfern Legal Centre states, "Today the NSW Police Force has reportedly admitted that its officers have been inconsistently and incorrectly applying strip search powers and that the law is fundamentally vague and open to wide interpretation."

"It is a huge reported admission by the NSW Police Force that will have wide legal ramifications. It potentially means that thousands of people may have been subjected to humiliating, harmful and potentially unlawful searches. Searches that may have required children, teenagers and adults to remove their clothing for possibly no legal reason."

"Although this internal NSW Police report raises the need for cultural and educational change, what we now want to see is immediate legislative change. It's not enough to just update education and training materials when police have reportedly admitted that the law itself is failing to provide rigorous and clear guidance to police."

"Legislative change is critical to ensuring that the law is providing fundamental safeguards for members of the public, protecting people from being subjected to unlawful strip searches," Ms Lee said.

Mr George Newhouse, Director of the National Justice Project and Adjunct Professor of Law at Macquarie University has backed the call for action on strip search laws, saying: "The law is being abused in a discriminatory manner. Aboriginal people are being targeted unfairly as well as festival goers. It's time for solid legislative change," Mr Newhouse said.

Mr Newhouse is one of over 60 signatories to an open letter to the NSW Police minister outlining concerns about current strip search laws and calling for legislative change. Other prominent members of the legal profession who have signed the open letter include former NSW Director of Public Prosecutions Nicholas Cowdery and the President of the NSW Bar Association, Tim Game SC. The letter, facilitated by Redfern Legal Centre, can be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/ssopenletter>

Redfern Legal Centre will be seeking an urgent meeting with the NSW Police Minister, the Hon. David Elliott, to brief the Minister about a forthcoming report commissioned by RLC and prepared by the University of New South Wales Law School about how to improve strip search laws in New South Wales. The report is due to be released soon.

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