

MEDIA RELEASE

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Call for NSW Police watchdog to investigate strip search quotas

Redfern Legal Centre is calling on the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) to investigate the impact of policing quotas on the drastic rise in the number of strip searches in NSW.

The NSW Police Commissioner in response to supplementary questions in Budget Estimates has revealed that NSW Police are required to meet KPIs and targets when it comes to personal and strip searches.

Samantha Lee, Head of the Police Accountability legal practice at Redfern Legal Centre states, "The use of targets may explain why the people of NSW have been exposed to a drastic rise in invasive, harmful and unlawful strip searches.

"'Quotas' or 'targets' create unnecessary tension between the public and law enforcement. Targets put frontline officers under enormous pressure, the temptation to cut corners becomes pervasive. If the public believe that searches are being made for reasons other than the goal of law enforcement, then their trust in the legitimacy of the system is substantially eroded," Ms Lee said.

"It is vital that this matter be referred to the LECC for immediate investigation, because such targets could be eroding the rights of many citizens, by potentially subjecting them to unnecessary and unlawful strip searches."

The '*Rethinking Strip Searches by NSW Police*' report, commissioned by Redfern Legal Centre and prepared by UNSW Law academics Dr Michael Grewcock and Dr Vicki Sentas, found an almost twentyfold increase in strip searches in just under 12 years.

The report found that strip searches were used 277 times in the 2006 calendar year, compared to 5483 in the 2018/19 financial year and that unlawful strip searches are widespread. The report also found only 30% of strip searches in the field in the 2017/18 financial year resulted in a criminal charge.

"Strip searches should only be conducted where the legal circumstances exist – not driven by targets as part of a numbers game," Ms Lee said.

In 2018, it was discovered a significant number of random breath tests conducted by Victoria Police in recent years have been fake, due to perverse incentives in key performance indicators.

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