

DISTRICT COURT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025

STATEMENT OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Need: Why is the policy needed based on factual evidence and stakeholder input?

The District Court of New South Wales is one of the central pillars of the justice system. The reforms in the Bill will support the ongoing operations of the District Court and ensure that the Court can respond to increasing demands placed on it as the largest trial court in Australia.

The workload of the District Court continues to increase. From 2022 to 2023, criminal trial matters increased by 14% and civil cases by 10%. The Court's work is also becoming more specialised and complex with the expansion of the Child Sexual Offence Evidence Program and introduction of the Walama List sentencing program in recent years.

Each of the policy proposals in the Bill responds to issues identified by the Chief Judge or other stakeholders involved with the District Court's operations, and reflects input from those stakeholders as to how best to support its functioning.

Objectives: What is the policy's objective couched in terms of the public interest?

This Bill will support the District Court's ongoing operations and better equip it to respond to the increasing volume and specialisation of its work by:

- a) establishing the office of Deputy Chief Judge of the District Court,
- b) conferring a power on the Chief Judge and Deputy Chief Judge of the Court to direct other judges of the Court to preside over specific matters or exercise specific functions, and
- c) providing that more than one Judicial Registrar can be appointed to the Court at one time.

This will, in turn, improve the administration of justice in New South Wales, benefiting users of the Court and other members of the community affected by its operations. The Bill will also promote access to justice and ensure that skilled and experienced judges are appropriately distributed across the whole of NSW.

Options: What alternative policies and mechanisms were considered in advance of the bill?

The identified issues and policy outcomes targeted in this Bill can only be achieved through legislative amendment.

Analysis: What were the pros/cons and benefits/costs of each option considered?

If the amendments are not made, increasing management and workload demands on the Chief Judge and the Judicial Registrar may impede the efficient management of the Court's operations and its civil caseload in particular.

Pathway: What are the timetable and steps for the policy's rollout and who will administer it?

The Bill will commence on assent. Once the relevant provisions in the Bill commence, the amendments will take effect. It is intended that two Deputy Chief Judges and an

additional Judicial Registrar will be appointed initially after passage of the Bill. Operational changes will be required to establish these roles and reflect their functions in the District Court's operations but the Bill is not intended to change how the Court carries out its core function of hearing and determining legal matters.

Consultation: Were the views of affected stakeholders sought and considered in making the policy?

Yes, the Chief Judge of the District Court was closely consulted on the reforms in the Bill throughout their development. The Department of Communities and Justice also consulted with the heads of jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and Local Court on the Bill.