

Media Release

The Hon Sonya Kilkenny MP
Attorney General
Minister for Planning



Monday, 20 January 2025

DEDICATED MAGISTRATE FOR REPEAT YOUTH OFFENDERS STARTS

The Allan Labor Government is increasing the capacity of the Children’s Court to hear criminal cases, including those involving repeat youth offenders, with a dedicated magistrate starting today.

Magistrate Julie O’Donnell will start in the Children’s Court to help ensure repeat youth offenders have their cases heard quickly and that there’s continuity in who hears them – ensuring these offenders are held accountable for their actions.

Ms O’Donnell brings more than 35 years’ experience in the legal system to the role and has focused extensively on criminal and child protection cases throughout her career, having most recently served at the Latrobe Valley Magistrates’ Court since 2022.

Previously she served at Dandenong Magistrates’ Court for more than a decade, as well as a senior lawyer at Victorian Legal Aid earlier in her career.

This appointment is another step in the Labor Government’s ongoing work to strengthen community safety and improve the justice system’s response to youth offending.

In December, new bail reforms started requiring bail decision makers to explicitly consider the risk to community safety posed by the risk of serious reoffending when granting bail.

If there is an unacceptable risk that they may commit a Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 offence – such as aggravated burglary, armed robbery, carjacking, or home invasion – bail must be refused.

These changes started alongside a new offence created specifically for committing a Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 offence while on bail.

The new Council on Bail, Rehabilitation and Accountability (COBRA) has been set up to stop the actions of repeat serious youth offenders. COBRA is made up of experts from police, youth justice, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of Health, schools and other sectors.

A trial of electronic monitoring with enhanced bail supervision and support will begin later this year.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny

“Ms O’Donnell will be a great asset to the Children’s Court. Her wealth of experience and expertise will ensure consistency in hearings and more accountability for repeat youth offenders.”

“We know there is a group of repeat offenders driving the rise in serious crimes – that’s why we’re taking action to hold them to account while offering support to help young people turn their lives around.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Youth Justice Enver Erdogan

“This is another important step in delivering a justice system that protects the community and rehabilitates young people.”

“We want to help victims get closure by holding young people to account and helping those who may be heading down a wrong path to realise the effects of their actions.”

Media contact: Casey Lodge 0410 964 928 | casey.lodge@minstaff.vic.gov.au

