



MEDIA RELEASE

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Outsourcing of court reporting an attack on women

The Baird Government's proposal to outsource court reporting services in the Supreme Court will have a disproportionate impact on women says the Public Service Association (PSA).

Of the 70 court reporters in NSW, 64 are women.

The Government's move will privatise the work of court reporters who record court proceedings in high speed shorthand and provide a daily transcription service for the judiciary and legal profession.

Instead, the Government proposes to use private contractor "sound monitors", and "transcription typists" (who transcribe from remote locations).

"The public service is one of the few working environments where women are adequately represented, making up 60% of public sector employees in NSW," said the PSA's Gender and Equity Analyst, Jenny Singleton.

"It also offers secure employment at a time when women are over represented in casual and insecure work."

Government court reporters, in conjunction with sound reporters, are responsible for accurately recording legal proceedings which ensure the effectiveness of both the criminal and civil justice systems.

Due to their specialised skills, court reporters have discretion to invoke editorial licence, halt proceedings if there is a need for clarification and ask a witness to repeat what they have said if it was not audible or clear.

"Sound monitors" are unable to do this and may be unaware of problems with a recording until after the proceedings have concluded with crucial parts of a trial simply inaudible for the transcription typists working from various locations.

An infamous example of such a situation played out during the trial in Queensland of former Bundaberg surgeon Dr Patel.

After court reporting services were outsourced to a private company that only employed sound monitors and transcription typists, jury members were asked to rely upon their memories in reaching a decision as the transcript of the recorded proceedings often read "indistinct", mixed up questions or simply did not make sense.

"The effect of outsourcing court reporting is two-fold," Ms Singleton said.

"Not only will it adversely affect a group of highly skilled women, who have a combined total of well over 600 years' experience, but it will erode the quality of NSW legal proceedings at the highest level."