



Advocacy Hotline for Information about Clients with Fines

You or your vulnerable clients must contact us first before we can assist.

How can I best help my clients who might have unpaid fines?

The best way to help your clients is to follow these steps:

- make it common practice to ask if they have a fines debt, letting them know that being honest about this will help
- let the State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO) know so we can place a temporary hold on all enforcement action
- make clients aware of the various options available to them (see below)
- where appropriate, submit an application for leniency on their behalf.

Note: if we don't have information that lets us know a client may be vulnerable, serious enforcement action is likely to be initiated against them.

What services are available to advocates?

We offer a priority phone and email service dedicated to registered advocates. You can call us on 1300 135 627 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday to Friday or you can make an enquiry through our website at any time.

What response times can I expect?

We will usually answer your call right away or within a few minutes. You can expect a response to your email within five working days.

Do I need to register?

Yes. Due to privacy laws, we can only give you information if you have registered. Each of your employees will need to be included on the registration before we can release information to them. You can register online at www.sdرو.nsw.gov.au by visiting the business partners area of our website.

Who will I be speaking to on the advocacy hotline?

A specialist advocacy team with strong knowledge of our processes manage the hotline.

The team works closely with vulnerable clients, such as:

- people who have a mental health impairment, cognitive impairment or intellectual disability
- people who are homeless
- people with serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances
- inmates and people recently released from custody
- people in serious financial, medical or domestic hardship
- young people.

What information can I obtain?

We can provide all the information you need to help your client. You can ask for information about your client's debt, such as offence details and balances, as well as advice on options available to your client.

Where can I get information outside of the hotline hours?

Our website has information about the fines process and options available to your client, as well as standard forms and other information.

You can make an enquiry through our website at any time.



How can I use your website?

Our website has information about the fine enforcement system, standard forms, answers to frequently asked questions and other useful information. For information specific to advocacy groups such as yours, visit the business partners area of the website.

With your client's consent you can also use Fines Self Service on our website to set up an affordable payment plan, check the balance of enforcement orders or dispute a voting fine.

What options are available to my client?

This will depend on your client's circumstances. There are many options available to help clients who cannot afford to pay in full, like pay by instalments, a Work and Development Order (WDO), going to court, postponing the debt or asking for the debt to be written off. We can help you determine the best option for your client.

What is a Work and Development Order?

WDOs allow certain groups to satisfy their debt via programs of work or by completing approved courses or treatment. An approved sponsor must support a WDO. Approved sponsors include government agencies, not-for-profit organisations and health practitioners. Refer to the WDO factsheet for more information.

Can I register as a WDO sponsor?

If you are a government agency, not-for-profit organisation or a health practitioner, you can apply to become an approved sponsor. Forms are available on our website.

You can contact the Department of Attorney General and Justice (DAGJ) for more information on (02) 8688 8099 or wdo@agd.nsw.gov.au

How flexible can you be when assessing applications relating to unpaid fines?

We understand it can be difficult for some vulnerable groups, such as homeless people, to provide certain information. We can apply some discretion and a flexible approach in some decision-making areas, however, we are bound by legislation when considering writing off fines and other applications relating to unpaid fines.

We act upon the information that is provided to us when assessing applications. Statements from advocate groups will assist us to make fair decisions.

I am concerned that even if I deal with these fines, my client will continue to get more fines in the future.

We have found that many vulnerable clients stop offending once their fines are dealt with. Fine mitigation options like the WDO scheme help vulnerable people make a fresh start.

However, we understand that some clients will continue to offend. The *Fines Act 1996* was amended in 2010 to give issuing officers greater discretion to issue a caution instead of a penalty notice in specific circumstances.

Caution and Internal Review Guidelines were published by DAGJ to assist issuing and reviewing officers determine when this is appropriate. The guidelines can be viewed at our website.

How are you improving contact with vulnerable clients?

We have partnered with Legal Aid and the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) to expand the WDO scheme. Legal Aid is working to recruit sponsors and this has increased applications to much higher levels.

We are also working more closely with other government agencies like the NSW Trustee & Guardian to assist our mutual clients. We hold regular fines days across the state to connect with advocacy groups and vulnerable clients.

We have two outreach officers who may be able to visit you to promote our services or assist with training so your staff will be better equipped to assist your clients in the future.

Much of our work in these areas is made possible because of advocacy groups like yours working in the interests of our mutual clients. If you have a suggestion about ways to connect with vulnerable groups, please contact us.

MORE INFORMATION



www.sdro.nsw.gov.au

For Advocacy Hotline:



1300 135 627
9:00 am – 5:00 pm, Mon. to Fri.



(02) 6354 7271



Email us via:
www.sdro.nsw.gov.au/contact/

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Department of Finance & Services

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