

News Business

Search...

ILLAWARRA
MERCURY (1)

MP backs special Illawarra drug court

By DOMINIC GEIGER
Nov. 1, 2013, 9:13 p.m.



Member for Wollongong Noreen Hay has supported calls to establish a court specifically to deal with drug-addicted criminals in the Illawarra.

Ms Hay's push comes as a public forum is to be held at the University of Wollongong on November 30, to inform the community about how drug courts work.

Ms Hay said data from the state's three other drug courts, located in Toronto (near Newcastle), Parramatta and Sydney proved they were an effective way to reduce drug use in the community, while also decreasing incarceration rates.

"The reviews and reports done ... concluded the drug court program reduced reoffending, drug use and the level of imprisonment," she said. "There is the recommendation from the law courts to expand drug courts ... obviously that would be of benefit to the people of the Illawarra and Wollongong and I'm always supportive of anything that can support reduction of drug use, particularly in young people."

Rather than sending someone who had repeatedly committed property offences while dealing with a drug addiction to prison, a drug court would allow the offender to be sentenced to a term of rehabilitation.

In the 12 months to May this year, drug offences increased 22.4 per cent in the Wollongong local government area, bringing the rate per 100,000 of population to 599.1.

However, Ms Hay said she did not believe Wollongong's drug offending rate was any higher than the rest of the state.

"I'm not saying we have any greater problem than anywhere else, but our community feels the impacts of the drug addiction problem, particularly in the CBD," she said.

"Anything we can do to assist those people and reduce their reliance on drugs would be a good thing for us and society."