

# Public Interest Disclosure Policy

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Purpose

All agencies in NSW are required to have a Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Policy under section 42 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 (PID Act)*.

At the Crown Solicitor's Office (CSO), we take reports of serious wrongdoing seriously. We are committed to building a 'speak up' culture where public officials are encouraged to report any conduct that they reasonably believe involves wrongdoing.

The integrity of our agency relies upon our staff, volunteers, contractors and subcontractors speaking up when they become aware of wrongdoing.

This policy sets out:

- how the CSO will support and protect you if you come forward with a report of serious wrongdoing
- how we will deal with the report and our other responsibilities under the *PID Act*
- who to contact if you want to make a report
- how to make a report
- the protections which are available to you under the *PID Act*.

This policy also documents our commitment to building a speak up culture. Part of that speak up culture is having in place a framework that facilitates public interest reporting of wrongdoing by:

- protecting those who speak up from detrimental action
- imposing duties on agencies who receive reports of wrongdoing to take appropriate action to investigate or otherwise deal with them.

In NSW, that framework is the *PID Act*.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the CSO Code of Conduct, CSO Fraud and Corruption Control Policy, CSO Grievance Policy and the [Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW government sector employees](#).

In formulating this policy, regard has been had to the NSW Ombudman's model policy and guidelines.

## 1.2 Accessibility of this policy

This policy is available on the CSO's public website as well as on the intranet.

A copy of the policy is also sent to all employees of the CSO on their commencement. A hard copy of the policy can be requested from People & Culture.

## Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to, and for the benefit of, all public officials in NSW. You are a public official if you are:

- a person employed by the CSO in an ongoing, temporary, term or casual basis
- a person providing services or exercising functions on behalf of an agency, including a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer
- an employee, partner or officer of an entity that provides services, under contract, subcontract or other arrangement, on behalf of an agency or exercises functions of an agency, and are involved in providing those services or exercising those functions
- other people who perform public official functions whose conduct and activities could be investigated by an investigating authority.

If the CSO engages consultants to assist the agency with their work, it should be noted that these consultants are not considered public officials under the *PID Act*.

The Crown Solicitor, other nominated disclosure officers and managers within the CSO have specific responsibilities under the *PID Act*. This policy also provides information on how people in these roles will fulfil their responsibilities. Other public officials who work in and for the public sector, but do not work for the CSO may use this policy if they want information on who they can report wrongdoing to within the CSO.

## Who does this policy not apply to?

This policy does not apply to:

- people who have received services from an agency and want to make a complaint about those services
- people, such as contractors, who provide services to an agency. For example, employees of a company that sold computer software to an agency.

This means that if you are not a public official, this policy does not apply to your complaint (there are some circumstances where a complaint can be deemed to be a voluntary PID, see section 2.9 of this policy for more information).

However, you can still make a complaint to the CSO. This can be done by writing a letter, emailing [CrownSol@cso.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CrownSol@cso.nsw.gov.au) or telephone (02) 9474 9000. If you have a complaint that is serious or complex, it is generally best to put it in writing.

## What is contained in this policy?

This policy will provide you with information on the following:

- ways you can make a voluntary PID to the CSO under the *PID Act*
- the names and contact details for the nominated disclosure officers in the CSO
- the roles and responsibilities of people who hold particular roles under the *PID Act* and who are employees of the CSO
- what information you will receive once you have made a voluntary PID

- protections available to people who make a report of serious wrongdoing under the *PID Act* and what we will do to protect you
- CSO procedures for dealing with disclosures
- CSO procedures for managing the risk of detrimental action and reporting detrimental action
- CSO record-keeping and reporting requirements
- how the CSO will ensure it complies with the *PID Act* and this policy.

If you require further information about this policy, how public interest disclosures will be handled and the *PID Act* you can:

- confidentially contact a nominated disclosure officer within the CSO
- contact the PID Advice Team within the NSW Ombudsman by phone: (2) 9286 1000 or email: [PIDadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:PIDadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au), or
- access the NSW Ombudsman's PID guidelines which are available on its website.

If you require legal advice with respect to the *PID Act* or your obligations under the *PID Act*, you may need to seek independent legal advice.

## 2. How to make a report of serious wrongdoing

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### 2.1 Reports, complaints and grievances

When a public official reports suspected or possible wrongdoing in the public sector, their report will be a PID if it has certain features which are set out in the *PID Act*.

Some internal complaints or internal grievances may also be PIDs, as long as they have the features of a PID. If an internal complaint or grievance is a report of serious wrongdoing, we will consider whether it is a PID. If it is a PID, we will deal with it as set out in this policy, but we will also make sure we follow our grievance handling policy and Code of Conduct in relation to matters involving a breach of the Code which may constitute misconduct.

It is important that we quickly recognise that we have received a PID. This is because once a PID is received, the person who has made the report is entitled to certain protections and we have certain decisions that we have to make on how we will deal with the PID and how we will protect and support the person who has made the report.

### 2.2 When will a report be a PID?

There are three types of PIDs in the *PID Act*. These are:

1. **Voluntary PID:** This is a PID where a report has been made by the public official because they decided, of their own accord, to come forward and disclose what they know.
2. **Mandatory PID:** This is a PID where the public official has made a report about serious wrongdoing because they have a legal obligation to make that report, or because making that report is an ordinary aspect of their role or function in an agency.
3. **Witness PID:** This is a PID where a person discloses information during an investigation of serious wrongdoing following a request or requirement of the investigator.

This policy mostly relates to making a voluntary PID and how we will deal with voluntary PIDs. People who make a mandatory PID or a witness PID are still entitled to protection. More information about protections is available in section [3](#) of this policy.

You can find more information about mandatory and witness PIDs in the Ombudsman's guidelines 'Dealing with mandatory PIDs' and 'Dealing with witness PIDs'.

Voluntary PIDs are the kind of PIDs most people have in mind when they think about public interest reporting and 'whistleblowing'.

They involve a public official making a report because they have information that they believe shows (or tends to show) serious wrongdoing, where they are not under

a legal obligation to make that report and where it is not an ordinary part of their role to report such wrongdoing.

A report is a voluntary PID if it has the following five features, which are set out in sections 24 to 27 of the *PID Act*:

1. a report is made by a public official
2. it is made to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs
3. the public official honestly and reasonably believes that the information they are providing shows (or tends to show) serious wrongdoing
4. the report was made orally or in writing
5. the report is voluntary (meaning it is not a mandatory or witness PID).

If the report has all five features, it is a voluntary PID.

You will not be expected to prove that what you reported actually happened or is serious wrongdoing. You *do* have to honestly believe, on reasonable grounds, that the information you are reporting shows or tends to show serious wrongdoing.

Even though you do not have to prove the serious wrongdoing happened or provide evidence, a mere allegation with no supporting information is unlikely to meet this test.

If we make an error and do not identify that you have made a voluntary PID, you will still be entitled to the protections under the *PID Act*.

If you make a report and believe we have made an error by not identifying that you have made a voluntary PID, you should raise this with a nominated disclosure officer or your contact officer for the report. If you are still not satisfied with this outcome, you can seek an internal review or we make seek to conciliate the matter. You may also contact the NSW Ombudsman. Further information on rights to internal review and conciliation is found in section 7 of this policy.

## 2.3 Who can make a voluntary PID?

Any public official can make a voluntary PID — see 'Who this policy applies to'. You are a public official if:

- you are employed by the CSO,
- you are a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer who provides services, or exercises functions, on behalf of the CSO, or
- you work for an entity (such as a non-government organisation) who is contracted by the CSO to provide services or exercise functions on behalf of the CSO — if you are involved in undertaking that contracted work.

A public official can make a PID about serious wrongdoing relating to *any* agency, not just the agency they are working for. This means that we may receive PIDs from public officials outside our agency. It also means that you can make a PID to any agency, including an integrity agency like the Independent Commission Against

Corruption (ICAC) and the NSW Ombudsman. Annexure B of this policy has a list of integrity agencies.

## 2.4 What is serious wrongdoing?

Reports must be of one or more of the following categories of *serious wrongdoing* to be a voluntary PID (in addition to having the other features set out here). 'Serious wrongdoing' is defined in the *PID Act* as:

- *corrupt conduct* — such as a public official accepting a bribe
- *serious maladministration* — such as an agency systemically failing to comply with proper recruitment processes when hiring staff
- *a government information contravention* — such as destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released under a Government Information Public Access application
- *a privacy contravention* — such as unlawfully accessing a person's personal information on an agency's database
- *a serious and substantial waste of public money* — such as an agency not following a competitive tendering process when contracting with entities to undertake government work.

When you make your report, you do not need to state what category of serious wrongdoing you are reporting or that you are reporting serious wrongdoing.

## 2.5 Who can I make a voluntary PID to?

For a report to be a voluntary PID, it must be made to certain public officials.

### **Making a report to a public official who works for the CSO**

You can make a report inside the CSO to:

- The Crown Solicitor.
- The Disclosures Coordinator.
- A disclosure officer for the CSO — a list of disclosure officers for the CSO and their contact details can be found at [Annexure A — Names and contact details of disclosure officers for the NSW Crown Solicitors Office](#) of this policy.

Your manager — this is the person who directly, or indirectly, supervises you. It can also be the person who you directly, or indirectly, report to. You may have more than one manager. Your manager will make sure that the report is communicated to a disclosure officer on your behalf or may accompany you while you make the report to a disclosure officer.

### **Making a report to a recipient outside of the CSO**

You can also make your report to a public official in another agency (meaning an agency you do not work for) or an integrity agency. These include:

- the *head of* another agency — this means the head of any public service agency



- an integrity agency — a list of integrity agencies is located at [Annexure B — List of integrity agencies](#) of this policy
- a disclosure officer for another agency — ways to contact disclosure officers for other agencies is located in an agency's PID policy which can be found on their public website
- a Minister or a member of a Minister's staff but the report must be made in writing.

If you choose to make a disclosure outside of the CSO, it is possible that your disclosure will be referred back to the CSO so that appropriate action can be taken.

### **Making a report to a Member of Parliament or journalist**

Disclosures to MPs or journalists are different to other reports. You can only disclose a report of wrongdoing as a voluntary PID to an MP or journalist in the following circumstances:

- You must have first made substantially the same disclosure (described here as a 'previous disclosure') to someone who can receive disclosures.
- The previous disclosure must be substantially true.
- You did not make the previous disclosure anonymously.
- You did not give a written waiver of your right to receive information relating to your previous disclosure.
- You did not receive the following from the CSO:
  - notification that the CSO will not investigate the serious wrongdoing and will also not refer the previous disclosure to another agency, or
  - the following information at the end of the investigation period:
    - ◆ notice of the CSO decision to investigate the serious wrongdoing
    - ◆ a description of the results of an investigation into the serious wrongdoing
    - ◆ details of proposed or recommended corrective action as a result of the previous disclosure or investigation.

Investigation period means:

- after six months from the previous disclosure being made, or
- after 12 months if you applied for an internal review of the agency's decision within six months of making the disclosure.

If all the above requirements are met, your disclosure to an MP or journalist may be a voluntary PID.

## **2.6 What form should a voluntary PID take?**

You can make a voluntary PID:

- *In writing* — this could be an email or letter to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs.
- *Orally* — have a private discussion with a person who can receive voluntary PIDs. This can be face-to-face, via telephone or virtually.

- *Anonymously* — write an email or letter or call a person who can receive PIDs to make a report without providing your name or anything that might identify you as the maker of the report. A report will only be considered anonymous if there is no reasonable or practical way of communicating with the person making the report. Even if you choose to remain anonymous, you will still be protected under the *PID Act*. It may be difficult, however, for the CSO to investigate the matter(s) you have disclosed if we cannot contact you for further information.

## 2.7 What should I include in my report?

You should provide as much information as possible so we can deal with the report effectively. The type of information you should include is:

- date, time and location of key events
- names of person(s) involved in the suspected wrongdoing, their role, title and how they are involved
- your relationship with the person(s) involved, such as whether you work closely with them
- your explanation of the matter you are reporting
- how you became aware of the matter you are reporting
- possible witnesses
- other information you have that supports your report.

## 2.8 What if I am not sure if my report is a PID?

You should report all wrongdoing you become aware of regardless of whether you think it is serious wrongdoing. It is important for the CSO to understand what is or may be occurring.

We are then responsible for making sure your report is handled appropriately under the *PID Act*, or if it is not a PID, in line with our other procedures. Even if your report is not a PID, it may fall within another one of the agency's policies for dealing with reports, allegations or complaints.

## 2.9 Deeming that a report is a voluntary PID

The Crown Solicitor can, in certain circumstances, determine that a report is a voluntary PID even if the report does not otherwise have all the features of a voluntary PID. This is known as the 'deeming power'.

By deeming that a report is a voluntary PID, it ensures that reporters are provided with protections under the *PID Act*.

If you make a report that has not met all the requirements of a voluntary PID, you can refer your matter to the Crown Solicitor to request that they consider deeming your report to be a voluntary PID.

A decision to deem a report to be a voluntary PID is at the discretion of the Crown Solicitor. For more information about the deeming power, see the Ombudsman's guideline 'Deeming that a disclosure is a voluntary PID'.

## Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact the Disclosures Coordinator or a disclosures officer. They can provide advice about the PID Framework, process and policy.

The CSO realises disclosers may want their identity and the fact they have a PID enquiry confidential. Where possible and appropriate the CSO will take steps to keep your identity, and the fact you have made an enquiry, confidential. If confidentiality cannot be maintained, a plan to support and protect you from reprisal will be developed in consultation with you.

## Protections

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### How is the maker of a voluntary PID protected?

When you make a voluntary PID you receive special protections under the *PID Act*.

The CSO is committed to taking all reasonable steps to protect you from detriment because of having made a PID. The CSO is also committed to maintaining your confidentiality as much as possible while the PID is being dealt with.

The CSO will not tolerate any type of detrimental action being taken against you because you have made a report, might make a report or are believed to have made a report.

The maker of a voluntary PID is protected in the following ways:

- *Protection from detrimental action*

- A person cannot take detrimental action against another person because they have made a voluntary PID or are considering making a PID. Detrimental action includes bullying, harassment, intimidation or dismissal.
- Once we become aware that a voluntary PID by a person employed or otherwise associated with the CSO that concerns serious wrongdoing relating to the CSO has been made, a risk assessment will be undertaken and steps will be taken to mitigate the risk of detrimental action occurring against the person who made the voluntary PID.
- It is a criminal offence for someone to take detrimental action against a person because they have made or may make a voluntary PID. It is punishable by a maximum penalty of 200 penalty units or imprisonment for five years or both.
- A person may seek compensation where unlawful detrimental action has been taken against them.
- A person can apply for a court order (injunction) where detrimental action is threatened or has occurred (for example, an order to prevent dismissal or to require reinstatement).

Note that a person who makes a PID can still be subject to reasonable management action (such as ordinary performance reviews and performance management). Provided such action is not taken because of the PID, it is not detrimental action under the *PID Act*.

- *Immunity from civil and criminal liability*

Some public officials are often subject to a duty of confidentiality that prevents them disclosing certain information that they obtain or become aware of at work. Sometimes, in order to make a PID, public officials will need to breach or disregard such confidentiality duties. If that happens, a public official cannot be disciplined, sued or criminally charged for breaching confidentiality.

- *Confidentiality*

Public officials and agencies must not disclose information tending to identify a person as the maker of a voluntary PID unless doing so is permitted by the *PID Act*.

- *Protection from liability for own past conduct*

The Attorney General can give the maker an undertaking that a disclosure of their own past conduct will not be used against them if a person discloses their own wrongdoing or misconduct while making a report. This undertaking can only be given on application by an integrity agency to the Attorney General.

3.2

## Protections for people who make mandatory and witness PIDs

Apart from PIDs that are made voluntarily by public officials, there are other types of reports that are recognised as PIDs under the *PID Act*:

- *A mandatory PID*: This is a PID where the public official has made the report about serious wrongdoing because they have a legal obligation to make that report, or because making that report is an ordinary aspect of their role or function in an agency.
- *A witness PID*: This is a PID where a person discloses information during an investigation of serious wrongdoing following a request or requirement of the investigator.

Protections for makers of mandatory and witness PIDs are detailed below.

- *Detrimental action* - It is an offence to take detrimental action against a person based on the suspicion, belief or awareness that a person has made, may have made or may make a PID.
- *Right to compensation* – A person can initiate proceedings and seek compensation for injury, damage or loss suffered as a result of detrimental action being taken against them.
- *Ability to seek injunction* – An injunction can be sought to prevent the commission or possible commission of a detrimental action offence against a person. For example, an order to prevent dismissal or to require reinstatement.
- *Immunity from civil and criminal liability* – a person will not incur civil or criminal liability if the person breaches a duty of confidentiality while making a disclosure. This means that legal action cannot be taken against a person for:
  - breaching a duty of secrecy or confidentiality, or
  - breaching another restriction on disclosure.

## 4. Reporting detrimental action

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If you experience adverse treatment or detrimental action, you should report this immediately.

Detrimental action means action causing, comprising or involving any of the following:

- injury, damage or loss
- intimidation, bullying or harassment
- discrimination, disadvantage or adverse treatment in relation to employment
- dismissal from, or prejudice in, employment
- disciplinary proceedings.

You can report any experience of adverse treatment or detrimental action directly to the CSO by contacting the Disclosures Coordinator or a disclosure officer.

Alternatively, a person can report detrimental action by emailing [CrownSol@csso.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CrownSol@csso.nsw.gov.au) or telephone (02) 9474 9000.

You can also make a report to an integrity agency. A list of integrity agencies is located at [Annexure B — List of integrity agencies](#) of this policy.

## General support

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The CSO will make sure that staff who have made a PID, regardless of whether their PID is treated as a PID, are provided with access to any professional support they may need because of the PID process – such as counselling support and wellbeing services.

Access to support may also be available for other staff involved in the internal PID process where appropriate. Disclosers and other staff involved in the process can discuss their support options with the Disclosures Coordinator.

Contact:

- CSO People & Culture via email [CSOPeople.Culture@cso.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CSOPeople.Culture@cso.nsw.gov.au) or speak directly with the CSO Wellbeing, Health & Safety Advisor, a People & Culture Partner or the Director, People & Culture
- The CSO Employee Assistance Program facilitated by Benestar via telephone 1300 360 364.

## 6. Roles and responsibilities of CSO employees

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Certain people within the CSO have responsibilities under the *PID Act*.

### 6.1 Crown Solicitor

The Crown Solicitor has ultimate responsibility for the CSO PID procedure and ensuring the CSO complies with the *PID Act*.

The Crown Solicitor, as Principal Officer, has responsibility:

- fostering a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged
- receiving disclosures from public officials
- ensuring there is a system in place for assessing disclosures
- ensuring the CSO complies with this policy and the *PID Act*
- ensuring that the CSO has appropriate systems for:
  - overseeing internal compliance with the *PID Act*
  - supporting public officials who make voluntary PIDs, including by minimising the risk of detrimental action
  - implementing corrective action if serious wrongdoing is found to have occurred
  - complying with reporting obligations regarding allegations or findings of detrimental action
  - complying with yearly reporting obligations to the NSW Ombudsman.

### 6.2 Disclosures Coordinator

The Disclosures Coordinator has a central role in the CSO's PIDs procedure. The Disclosures Coordinator can receive and assess PIDs and is the primary point of contact in the CSO for the discloser. The Disclosures Coordinator has a responsibility to:

- Assess disclosures to determine whether or not a disclosure should be treated as a PID, and to decide how each disclosure will be dealt with.
- Coordinate the CSO's response to a PID.
- Acknowledge PIDs and provide updates and feedback to the discloser.
- Assess whether it is possible and appropriate to keep the discloser's identity confidential.
- Assess the risk of reprisal and workplace conflict related to or likely to arise out of a PID and develop strategies to manage any risk identified.
- Where required, provide or coordinate support to staff involved in the PID or investigation process, including protecting the interests of any officer the subject of a PID.
- Ensure the CSO complies with the *PID Act*.



## Disclosure officers

Disclosure officers are additional points of contact within the internal reporting system. They have responsibility to:

- provide advice about the PID policy and reporting system
- receive reports from public officials
- receive reports when they are passed on to them by managers
- make arrangements to ensure the discloser can make disclosures privately and discreetly when requested, if necessary away from the workplace
- discuss with the discloser any concerns they may have about reprisal or workplace conflict
- ensure reports are dealt with appropriately, including by referring the matter to the Disclosures Coordinator
- ensure that any oral reports that have been received are recorded in writing and signed and dated by the discloser.

## Supervisors and managers

Supervisors and managers play an important role in managing the immediate workplace of those involved in or affected by the internal PID process. Supervisors and managers should be aware of the PID policy and are responsible for creating a local work environment where staff are comfortable and confident about making a PID. The responsibilities of supervisors and managers include:

- receiving reports from persons that report to them or that they supervise
- passing on reports they receive to a disclosure officer
- encouraging staff to use the procedure established by this policy when making a PID covered by the *PID Act*, and support staff when they do
- implement strategies, in consultation with a disclosure officer or the disclosure coordinator, to minimise the risk of reprisal or workplace conflict in relation to a PID
- notify the Disclosures Coordinator or Crown Solicitor immediately if they believe a staff member is being subjected to reprisal because of making a PID.

## All employees

All employees must:

- report suspected serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- use their best endeavours to assist in an investigation of serious wrongdoing if asked to do so by a person dealing with a voluntary PID on behalf of the CSO
- treat any person dealing with or investigating reports of serious wrongdoing with respect.

All employees must not take detrimental action against any person who has made, may in the future make, or is suspected of having made, a PID.

## 7. How we will deal with voluntary PIDs

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### 7.1 How the CSO will acknowledge that we have received a report and keep the person who made it informed

When a disclosure officer in the CSO receives a report which is a voluntary PID, or looks like it may be a voluntary PID, the person who made the report will receive the following information:

- You will receive an acknowledgment that the report has been received. This acknowledgement will:
  - state that the report will be assessed to identify whether it is a PID
  - state that the PID Act applies to how the CSO deals with the report
  - provide clear information on how you can access this PID policy
  - provide you with details of a contact person and available supports.
- If the report is a voluntary PID, we will inform you as soon as possible how we intend to deal with the report. This may include:
  - that we are investigating the serious wrongdoing
  - that we will refer the report to a different agency (if appropriate) to deal with the voluntary PID. If we do this, we will provide you with details of this referral
  - If we decide to not investigate the report and to not refer it to another agency for it to be investigated, we will tell you the reasons for this decision. We will also notify the NSW Ombudsman of this decision.
- If we decide to investigate the serious wrongdoing, we will provide you with updates on the investigation at least every three months. During this time, if you would like more frequent updates, you should contact the contact person who was nominated when you made the report.
- If we investigate the serious wrongdoing, we will provide you with the following information once the investigation is complete:
  - a description of the results of the investigation — that is, we will tell you whether we found that serious wrongdoing took place.
  - information about any corrective action as a result of the investigation/s — this means we will tell you what action we took in relation to the person who engaged in the serious wrongdoing or if the serious wrongdoing was by our agency, what we have put in place to address that serious wrongdoing.  
Note: Corrective action could include taking disciplinary action against someone or changing the practices, policies and procedures that we have in place which led to the serious wrongdoing.
- There may be some details about both the findings made as a result of the investigation and the corrective action taken that cannot be revealed to you. We will always balance the right of a person who makes a report to know the outcome of that report, with other legal obligations we have.
- If you have made an anonymous report, in many cases we may not be able to provide this information to you.

## How the CSO will deal with voluntary PIDs

All disclosures will be promptly and thoroughly assessed to determine what action will be taken to deal with the disclosure and whether or not the disclosure will be treated as a voluntary PID. This assessment is undertaken to identify whether the report is a voluntary PID or another type of disclosure, and to make sure that the right steps are followed. If it is a voluntary PID, we will ensure that we comply with the requirements in the *PID Act*.

The Disclosures Coordinator is responsible for assessing disclosures received by or referred to the Disclosures Coordinator, Crown Solicitor or a disclosure officer. Where appropriate, this assessment will be undertaken in consultation with the Crown Solicitor.

All disclosures will be assessed on the information available to the disclosure officer at the time. It is up to the Disclosures Coordinator to decide whether an investigation should be carried out and how that investigation should be carried out. In assessing a disclosure, the Disclosures Coordinator may decide that the disclosure should be referred elsewhere or that no action should be taken on the disclosure.

### ***Report not a voluntary PID***

Even if the report is not a voluntary PID, it will still need to be dealt with in a manner consistent with our grievance handling procedures or through an alternate process.

If the report is not a voluntary PID, we will let you know that the *PID Act* does not apply to the report and how we will deal with the concerns raised in the report.

If you are not happy with this assessment or otherwise disagree with it, you can raise it with the person who has communicated the outcome with you or a disclosure officer, request an internal review or request that the matter be conciliated. The CSO can, but do not have to, request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the matter.

### ***Cease dealing with report as a voluntary PID***

The CSO may stop dealing with a voluntary PID because it is not actually a voluntary PID (meaning it does not have all the features of a PID). In these circumstances, we will let you know of the reasons why the report is not a voluntary PID and how we will deal with the concerns raised in the report.

### ***Where the report is a voluntary PID***

If the report is a voluntary PID:

- In most cases we will conduct an investigation, which may be undertaken internally or referred to an external investigator, to make findings about whether the serious wrongdoing disclosed in the report occurred, who was involved, who was responsible, and whether the people involved, or the agency engaged, in serious wrongdoing. There may be circumstances where we believe an investigation is not warranted — for example, if the conduct has previously been investigated.

- There may also be circumstances where we decide that the report should be referred to another agency, such as an integrity agency. For example, reports concerning possible corrupt conduct may be required to be reported to the ICAC in accordance with section 11 of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*.
- Before referring a matter, we will discuss the referral with the other agency, and we will provide you with details of the referral and a contact person within the other agency.
- If we decide not to investigate a report and to not refer the matter to another agency, we must let you know the reasons for this and notify the NSW Ombudsman.

### 7.3 How the CSO will protect the confidentiality of the maker of a voluntary PID

We understand that people who make voluntary PIDs may want their identity and the fact that they have made a report to be confidential.

Under the *PID Act*, information tending to identify a person as the maker of a voluntary PID (known as identifying information) is not to be disclosed by a public official or an agency.

There are certain circumstances under the *PID Act* that allow for the disclosure of identifying information. These include:

- where the person consents in writing to the disclosure
- where it is generally known that the person is the maker of the voluntary PID because of their voluntary self-identification as the maker
- when the public official or the CSO reasonably considers it necessary to disclose the information to protect a person from detriment
- where it is necessary the information be disclosed to a person whose interests are affected by the disclosure
- where the information has previously been lawfully published
- when the information is disclosed to a medical practitioner or psychologist for the purposes of providing medical or psychiatric care, treatment or counselling to the individual disclosing the information
- when the information is disclosed for the purposes of proceedings before a court or tribunal
- when the disclosure of the information is necessary to deal with the disclosure effectively
- if it is otherwise in the public interest to disclose the identifying information.

We will not disclose identifying information unless it is necessary and authorised under the *PID Act*.

We will put in place steps to keep the identifying information of the maker and the fact that a report has been made confidential. It may not be possible for us to maintain complete confidentiality while we progress the investigation, but we will do

all that we practically can to not unnecessarily disclose information from which the maker of the report can be identified.

If confidentiality cannot be maintained or is unlikely to be maintained, we will:

- advise the person whose identity may become known
- implement strategies to support and protect against the risk of detrimental action
- providing additional supports to the person who has made the PID
- remind persons who become aware of the identifying information of the consequences for failing to maintain confidentiality and that engaging in detrimental action is a criminal offence and may also be a disciplinary matter.

If you make a PID, it is important that you only discuss your PID with those responsible for dealing with it. In the CSO this will be a disclosure officer, disclosure coordinator or the Crown Solicitor. The fewer people who know about your PID, before and after you make it, the more likely it will be that the CSO can protect you from any detrimental action.

Any staff involved in the investigation or dealing with a PID, including witnesses, are also required to maintain confidentiality and not disclose information about the process or allegations to any person except for those people responsible for handling the PID.

#### 7.4

### How the CSO will assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action

The CSO will not tolerate any detrimental action being taken by any person against a person who has made a PID, investigators, witnesses or the person the report is about.

We will assess and take steps to mitigate detrimental action from being taken against the maker of a voluntary PID, the person whose conduct is the subject of a PID, investigators and witnesses.

We will take steps to assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action by completing a risk assessment and risk management plan to identify strategies to deal with any identified risks and determine the level of protection and support that is appropriate.

Depending on the circumstances, the CSO may:

- relocate the discloser or the staff member who is the subject of the allegation within the current workplace
- transfer the discloser or the staff member who is the subject of the allegation to another role for which they are qualified
- grant the discloser or the staff member who is subject of the allegation leave of absence during the investigation of the PID.

These courses of action are not a reprisal and will only be taken in consultation with the discloser.

Detrimental action against a person is an act or omission that causes, comprises, involves or encourages detriment to a person or a threat of detriment to a person (whether express or implied). Detriment to a person includes:

- injury, damage or loss
- property damage
- reputational damage
- intimidation, bullying or harassment
- unfavourable treatment in relation to another person's job
- discrimination, prejudice or adverse treatment
- disciplinary proceedings or disciplinary action, or
- any other type of disadvantage.

Detrimental action does not include:

- Lawful action taken by a person or body to investigate serious wrongdoing or other misconduct.
- The lawful reporting or publication of a finding of serious wrongdoing or other misconduct.
- The lawful making of adverse comment, resulting from investigative action.
- The prosecution of a person for a criminal offence.
- Reasonable management action taken by someone in relation to a person who made or may make a PID. For example, a reasonable appraisal of a PID maker's work performance.

## 7.5

### How the CSO will deal with allegations of a detrimental action offence

If you believe that detrimental action has been or is being taken against you or someone else in reprisal for making a PID, you should tell your supervisor, manager, a PID officer, PID coordinator or the Crown Solicitor immediately.

All supervisors and managers must notify a PID officer, PID coordinator or the Crown Solicitor if they suspect that reprisal against an employee is occurring or has occurred, or if any such allegations are made to them.

If we become aware of an allegation that a detrimental action offence has occurred or may occur, we will:

- Assess the report of reprisal to decide whether it should be treated as a PID and whether the matter warrants investigation
- take all steps possible to stop the action and protect the person(s)
- take appropriate disciplinary action against anyone proven to take detrimental action
- refer any evidence of a detrimental action offence to the Commissioner of Police and the ICAC or the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (whichever is applicable)

- notify the NSW Ombudsman about the allegation of a detrimental action offence being committed.

If you allege reprisal, you will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation or other action taken in response to the allegation.

If you have made a PID and are experiencing reprisal which you believe is not being dealt with effectively, contact the Ombudsman or the ICAC (depending on the type of PID you made). Contact details for these investigating authorities are included in Annexure B.

## 7.6

### What the CSO will do if an investigation finds that serious wrongdoing has occurred

If, after an investigation, it is found that serious wrongdoing or misconduct may have occurred, the Crown Solicitor may make a finding of misconduct and take action in accordance with s.69(4) of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, by first following the procedural requirements contained in Part 8 of the *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014*.

Corrective action taken by the Crown Solicitor may include:

- a formal apology
- improving internal policies to adequately prevent and respond to similar instances of wrongdoing
- providing additional education and training to staff where required
- taking employment action against persons involved in the wrongdoing (such as termination of employment, relocation, a caution or reprimand)
- payment of compensation to people who have been affected by serious wrongdoing or other misconduct.

## 8. Review and dispute resolution

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### 8.1 Internal review

People who make voluntary PIDs can seek internal review of the following decisions made by the Crown Solicitor:

- that the CSO is not required to deal with the report as a voluntary PID
- to stop dealing with the report because it was decided the matter was not a voluntary PID
- to not investigate the serious wrongdoing and not refer the report to another agency
- to cease investigating the serious wrongdoing without either completing the investigation or referring the report to another agency for investigation.

The CSO will ensure internal reviews are conducted in compliance with the *PID Act*.

If you would like to make an application to the Disclosures Coordinator for an internal review, you must apply in writing within 28 days of being informed of the CSO's decision. The application should state the reasons why you consider CSO's decision should not have been made. You may also submit any other relevant material with your application.

The Disclosures Coordinator will advise the person making an application for an internal review the details of who will conduct the review and expected timeframes for the completion of the review.

### 8.2 Voluntary dispute resolution

If a dispute arises between the CSO and a person who has made a report which is, or may be, a voluntary PID, we may request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the dispute. Conciliation is a voluntary process and will only be suitable for disputes where the CSO and the maker of the report are willing to resolve the dispute.



## 9. Other agency obligations

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### 9.1 Record-keeping requirements

The CSO must keep full and accurate records with respect to all information received in connection with the *PID Act*. This ensures that the CSO complies with its obligations under the *State Records Act 1998*.

Information received will be stored in the CSO's electronic documents management system and will be managed in accordance with the CSO Classification and Handling Sensitive Information Policy.

### 9.2 Reporting of voluntary PIDs and the CSO's annual return to the Ombudsman

Each year the CSO will provide an annual return to the NSW Ombudsman which includes:

- information about voluntary PIDs received by the CSO during each return period (yearly with the start date being 1 July)
- action taken by the CSO to deal with voluntary PIDs during the return period
- how the CSO promoted a culture in the workplace where PIDs are encouraged.

### 9.3 How the CSO will ensure compliance with the *PID Act* and this policy

This policy will be reviewed by the CSO in accordance with the Policy and Procedure Policy schedule. The CSO may refer to the NSW Ombudsman's Public Interest Disclosures Unit for any required advice or guidance on how to conduct the review.

People & Culture will monitor training compliance through the CSO's learning management system to ensure all relevant employees are aware of their responsibilities under the *PID Act*.

## Annexure A — Names and contact details of disclosure officers for the NSW Crown Solicitors Office

Name	Role	Contact information
<b>Karen Smith</b> Crown Solicitor	Agency Head	<b>Writing:</b> The Crown Solicitor Crown Solicitor's Office GPO Box 25 SYDNEY NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:Karen.Smith@cso.nsw.gov.au">Karen.Smith@cso.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>Jane Francis</b> Director, People & Culture	Disclosures Coordinator	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9474 9000 <b>Writing:</b> Jane Francis Crown Solicitor's Office GPO Box 25 SYDNEY NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:Jane.Francis@cso.nsw.gov.au">Jane.Francis@cso.nsw.gov.au</a>

## Annexure B — List of integrity agencies

Integrity agency	What they investigate	Contact information
<b>The NSW Ombudsman</b>	Most kinds of <b>serious maladministration</b> by most agencies and public officials (but not NSW Police, judicial officers or MPs)	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 451 524 between 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday <b>Writing:</b> Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:info@ombo.nsw.gov.au">info@ombo.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Auditor-General</b>	<b>Serious and substantial waste of public money</b> by auditable agencies	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9275 7100 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 12, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:governance@audit.nsw.gov.au">governance@audit.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>Independent Commission Against Corruption</b>	<b>Corrupt conduct</b>	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 8281 5999 or toll free on 1800 463 909 (callers outside Sydney) between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 500, Sydney NSW 2001 or faxing 02 9264 5364 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au">icac@icac.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption</b>	<b>Serious maladministration</b> by the ICAC or the ICAC officers	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9228 3023 <b>Writing:</b> PO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au">oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission</b>	<b>Serious maladministration</b> by the NSW Police Force or the NSW Crime Commission	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9321 6700 or 1800 657 079 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 3880, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au">contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission</b>	<b>Serious maladministration</b> by the LECC and LECC officers	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9228 3023 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:olecc_executive@olecc.nsw.gov.au">olecc_executive@olecc.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>Office of the Local Government</b>	<b>Local government pecuniary interest contraventions</b>	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:olg@olg.nsw.gov.au">olg@olg.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Privacy Commissioner</b>	<b>Privacy contraventions</b>	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 472 679 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au">ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Information Commissioner</b>	<b>Government information contraventions</b>	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 472 679 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au">ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au</a>

## Policy information

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### Document details

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30/7/2014	1	I V Knight, Crown Solicitor	
14/6/2017	2	Tom Gilmartin, Practice Manager	
8/4/2020	3	Karen Smith, Crown Solicitor	
	4	Karen Smith, Crown Solicitor	Updated policy to reflect the implementation of the <i>Public Interest Disclosure Act 2022</i> .

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