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MEDIA RELEASE: A Smarter Approach to Youth Justice & Community Safety

A new group being launched in Melbourne today believes that the Baillieu Government's crackdown on crime could backfire, leading to negative consequences for communities and vulnerable young people in the long term.

The group, Smart Justice for Young People, made up of over 30 legal, community and youth welfare organisations hopes to dispel the myths surrounding youth justice.

"There is a belief that 'tough on crime' approaches work, however we are here to show that there is a smarter - and not necessarily tougher - way to deal more effectively with community safety issues," Tiffany Overall, the group's spokesperson and Co-Director of Youthlaw, said.

International evidence suggests punitive 'quick-fix' measures don't necessarily lead to a drop in crime rates. In Victoria, quick-fixes have included more police with more powers, the introduction of armed protective service officers at train stations and tougher sentences.

"The reality is that these approaches lead to more young people's rights being breached and more young people being locked up. This will not create the law-abiding citizens we want in our communities," Ms. Overall said.

"We want to encourage Victorian political parties to develop policies and practices affecting children and young people that are in line with what we know works. Rather than being driven by the media and waves of popular community opinion, it is time for government to get smart about youth justice and listen to the experts and young people themselves," Ms. Overall said.

Members of Smart Justice for Young People include Youthlaw, Federation of Community Legal Centres, Law Institute of Victoria, Jesuit Social Services, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.

The group's initial focus is on policing practices and policies that affect young people. Many young people feel that they are over-policed, often being stopped, questioned and searched because of the way they look, what they are wearing and where they are located.

Smart Justice for Young People is committed to addressing other important youth justice issues as they arise, such as the Government's current consideration of the proposal to introduce mandatory sentences of 2 years for 16 and 17 year olds committing offences of gross violence.

A fact sheet on minimum mandatory sentencing of 16 & 17 year olds and two factsheets on the rights of young people when interacting with police can be found at www.smartjustice.org.au by clicking the link to Smart Justice for Young People.

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