

Smart Justice

“Smart action for a safer community”

Media Release

\$500m prison not safer or smarter in a tight Budget

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Amid a tight State Budget, a coalition of legal and community groups says a \$500 million commitment to a new prison continues a dangerous trend of ineffective and expensive prison expansion that will fail to prevent crime, tackle its causes, or rehabilitate prisoners so they are less likely to re-offend.

“If the focus is on fiscal restraint, the least we should expect from the State Government is a focus on essentials and measures that work. On the evidence, the case for building further prisons instead of cheaper, more effective and safer alternatives has not been made,” Smart Justice spokesperson Hugh de Kretser said today.

Council of Australian Government figures show that imprisonment is, on average, nearly 13 times more expensive than alternatives to prison (\$90,000 cf \$7000 per year), which research suggests are no less effective in preventing crime and avoid placing people in an environment that may actually promote future offending.

Imprisonment in Victoria has grown by 44% in the last decade, with mandatory sentencing and the abolition of suspended sentences set to worsen a similar projected increase to 2020. Unless this trend is halted, prison spending over the next decade is estimated to exceed \$1 billion, with nearly \$200 million operating expenditure on top of current costs.

“Do we want to exacerbate an already alarming trend or choose a smarter path that will reduce imprisonment and crime in a way we can sustain economically and, equally importantly, that will help to sustain a safer and more just society?

“This question is now being faced by the NSW Coalition Government, which is moving to break the cycle of re-offending, reduce imprisonment and achieve significant savings through plans to close some prisons,” de Kretser said.

He said the construction and prison jobs to result from the announcement were likely to be far outweighed by the economic and social costs of turning to prisons as a flawed answer to crime.

The prison announcement comes as funding for family services, out-of-home care and child protection lags far behind at \$366 million compared with the \$500 million allocation for a single prison.

“Despite some welcome measures announced for child protection, the chronic under-investment in this area risks producing the prisoners of tomorrow because we know that child neglect is a major factor in future imprisonment,” de Kretser said.

Smart Justice factsheets “*More prisons are not the answer to reducing crime*” and “*Justice reinvestment: investing in communities not prisons*” are available at www.smartjustice.org.au.

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