

Smart Justice

"Smart action for a safer community"

Media Release

Community safety not served by Budget prison boost

Tuesday 7 May 2013 – For immediate release

The 2013–2014 Victorian State Budget has again focused on extending the prison system – an expensive approach to crime that will fail to boost community safety and will divert urgently needed funds from programs addressing the causes of crime, according to Smart Justice, a coalition of organisations led by the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

"In tight economic conditions, there are far better investments in community safety than \$131.5 million for 357 new prison beds and a new 40-bed high-security unit at Barwon Prison. We need to invest in alternatives to prison that address the causes of crime, reduce offending, and do not contribute to a spiralling prison population that hardens criminals and is economically unsustainable," said Smart Justice spokesperson, Michelle McDonnell, today.

The expenditure comes on top of \$819 million prison funding announced last year.

"With a commitment to ever-increasing surpluses and continuing strong growth in prison expenditure, we know that it will be the social programs that address the causes of crime that will lose out, together with community safety," McDonnell said.

Smart Justice welcomed the announcement of \$8.4 million for a Crime Statistics Agency as it is potentially one way of gathering the independent evidence that increased spending on prisons does not work to reduce crime. The project also welcomed \$16.5 million over four years to expand victim support through the extension of a hotline service and counselling, though a greater focus on victim support was still needed, McDonnell noted.

"Together with \$31.8 million for new and refurbished police stations, this is a lop-sided justice budget with the investment at the wrong end. We need to target early intervention and prevention instead of housing the consequences of a failed system in prisons," McDonnell concluded.

For more information about Smart Justice, visit www.smartjustice.org.au.

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