

Smart Justice

"Smart action for a safer community"

Media Release

Growing imprisonment rates an expensive non-solution to community safety

Thursday 23 May 2013 – For immediate release

The continued growth in Victoria's imprisonment rate detailed in the latest report of the Sentencing Advisory Council will potentially worsen under law-and-order measures yet to come on stream, according to the Smart Justice project, a coalition of organisations led by the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

Victoria's Prison Population 2002–2012 was today released by the Sentencing Advisory Council.*

"The report adds to concern following a State Budget boost for prisons that will do little to promote community safety, but will reduce funding available for early intervention and prevention programs that address the causes of crime," said Smart Justice spokesperson, Michelle McDonnell today.

The total abolition of suspended sentences and introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing will further contribute to the 40 per cent growth in prisoner numbers over the last decade and imprisonment rates not seen in Victoria since the late 19th Century.

"We know that the States with the highest imprisonment rates have the highest recidivism rates, and we should expect scarce funding to be used in a way that maximises community safety. An evidence-based analysis shows that prisons aren't the answer," Ms McDonnell said.

Previous research by the Sentencing Advisory Council noted that:

Research into *specific* deterrence shows that imprisonment has, at best, no effect on the rate of reoffending and often results in a greater rate of recidivism.**

The latest report found that an increase in drug offences was a factor in climbing imprisonment rates, yet these offences were subject to a "replacement effect" in which offenders imprisoned for drug offences were simply replaced by new offenders in the community.

"This points to the need for an early intervention and prevention approach that tackles the underlying causes of drug-related crime, focuses on treatment and rehabilitation, drug diversion, harm reduction and better support in and out of prison.

The recent State Budget announced \$131.5m new prison spending in addition to \$819m funding announced last year.

“If we have an expensive ‘solution’ that doesn’t work, we should try an economically sustainable approach that does,” Ms McDonnell said.

She said the Smart Justice project would soon launch its own report showing that the imprisonment rate in Victoria is on track to overtake NSW, despite the economic unsustainability of prisons and their ineffectiveness as a solution to community safety.

“It’s time for an urgent rethink on how to stop crime,” Ms McDonnell concluded.

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

**Victoria’s Prison Population 2002–2012*

<http://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/news/2013-05-23/more-victorians-going-prison-and-longer>

***Does Imprisonment Deter? A Review of the Evidence*

<http://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/content/publications/does-imprisonment-deter-review-evidence>

See also:

Community safety not served by Budget prison boost

http://www.smartjustice.org.au/resources/Budget_SJ_070513_Final.pdf

Reducing drug-related crime

http://www.smartjustice.org.au/cb_pages/fs_reducing_drug_related_crime.php

For interview:

Michelle McDonnell 0488 778 099

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