

Smart Justice

"Smart action for a safer community"

Media Release

Prison expansion a sign of failure in the fight against crime

27 April 2012

Today's announcement by the Victorian Government of plans to build a new 500 bed prison in Melbourne's West is further evidence that Victoria is getting it wrong on tackling crime according to Smart Justice, a coalition of legal and community groups.

"Jail expansion on this scale is a sign of failure in the fight against crime," said Hugh de Kretser, Smart Justice spokesperson. "The half a billion price tag for the extra jail beds is half a billion that will be diverted away from programs that are far cheaper and more effective in cutting crime. Corrections Victoria data shows less than one in ten male prisoners finish high school and yet the Government is cutting the successful VCAL program which provides high school equivalent education for at-risk youth. This is a sign of what's to come as more and more proven programs are starved of funds while the state feeds its multi-billion dollar appetite for prison expansion."

In Victoria over the past decade, prisoner numbers have grown at more than twice the rate of population growth. The previous Labor government predicted a further 45% expansion in prisoner numbers to 2020 and the Coalition's sentencing policies are expected to accelerate this increase. NSW has for many years locked up people at close to twice the rate of Victoria, costing hundreds of millions in additional prison spending each year. Yet its crime rate isn't any lower. NSW Attorney-General Greg Smith has acknowledged, "Building more prisons...is expensive and does little to make a better society. This state cannot afford to keep incarcerating more people, and spending will have to shift to reducing incarceration rates." NSW, in contrast to Victoria, is cutting its prison population, closing jails and saving taxpayers funds.

"Prison can contribute to higher reoffending rates," said Mr de Kretser. "Half of Victorian prisoners have been in jail before. Instead of responding after the damage is done, we should be investing in programs which have been shown to prevent crime from occurring in the first place."

Smart Justice also expressed grave concerns about plans for the new Victorian prison to be privately-run. The Productivity Commission recently showed that Victoria's prisons are amongst the nation's most expensive to run, despite having the highest level of privatisation. "Private prisons can be less effective and less accountable and can contribute to greater levels of abuse," said Mr de Kretser. "Locking people away for profit is not the answer to cutting crime."

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.

Further information:

Hugh de Kretser 0403 965 340

www.smartjustice.org.au