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THROWING BILLIONS AT LOCKING PEOPLE UP WILL NOT ADDRESS CAUSES OF CRIME

Jesuit Social Services today called for an urgent reassessment of the Baillieu Government's planned Minimum Mandatory Sentencing in Victoria, because the laws will not deter offenders, lower the crime rate or tackle causes of crime all while wasting billions of taxpayers' dollars.

Jesuit Social Services, CEO, Julie Edwards said that the proposed Minimum Mandatory Sentencing policy also contravened the Children, Youth and Families Act (2005) and would put increased burden on the court system.

"The Baillieu Government needs to scrap Minimum Mandatory Sentencing before thousands of young lives are condemned to a lifetime of taxpayer funded institutionalisation.

"Jesuit Social Services works with young people in the youth justice sector – helping around 500 young people per year break the cycle of reoffending.

"The Government has a responsibility to shape a justice system that reflects community attitude and its expectations about safety and justice. It also has a responsibility to base its policies on facts, not fear and myths.

Ms Edwards also questioned why the only factors that would mean a judge should not jail an offender for the minimum mandatory period under the new laws are factors so unusual that Parliament could not have intended them to be covered.

"It is unfathomable to assume that Parliamentarians could have intended mental illness, drug or alcohol influence or a combination of these factors to be outside of the factors 'so unusual'. This leads to the contention of what does constitute circumstances that are 'so unusual'", she said.

"Being quick to lock people up to reduce crime overlooks many facts and substantial evidence around deterrence, re-offending, prison capacity, and does little to keep the community safe – it also overlooks the fundamental truth that prisoners eventually return to society.

"A KPMG report found that with Community Group Conferencing, more than 80 per cent had not re-offended within two years of participating – which shows just how successful community service interventions and diversion programs can be.

"Putting young people into prisons means more prison costs, more policing costs, more court costs and they are more likely to reoffend.

"Our submission to the Sentencing Advisory Council Victoria's study into the introduction of Mandatory Minimum Sentences clearly makes the point that the Victorian community and taxpayers would be better served by a focus on early intervention and prevention – the causes of crime: poverty, homelessness, mental health and addiction problems, rather than locking our young offenders up without due consideration of their circumstances," Ms Edwards said.

Jesuit Social Services works in the following areas: Justice and Crime Prevention; Settlement and Community Building; Mental Health Support and Wellbeing; Education, Training and Employment since 1977. For more information or a copy of the submission visit www.jss.org.au

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