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## CALL FOR PAROLE AND POST- RELEASE SERVICES TO BE FUNDED

Parole and post release services must be properly resourced to ensure prisoners are given the best chance of rehabilitation, Jesuit Social Services said in its submission to the Sentence Advisory Council's Review of Victoria's Adult Parole Framework today.

Jesuit Social Services Chief Executive Officer, Julie Edwards, said the effectiveness of the parole system and the proper management of parolees hinged on proper resourcing and funding, not on legislative and administrative frameworks. "We've got to fund the system to actually give people caught in the cycle of offending a chance to break that cycle, not set them up to fail", she said.

Ms Edwards emphasized the importance of parole in changing offending behaviour, reducing crime and, ultimately, improving community safety, "The evidence is clear that offenders who have the prospect of parole are more likely to engage in treatments such as those relating to alcohol and other drugs, which means they are actually changing behaviours and are less likely to reoffend. Because their date with freedom is in their own hands they are more likely to change the behaviour that got them in the justice system in the first place," Ms Edwards said.

"About one in four prisoners will be reconvicted within three months of being released from prison and between 35 and 41 per cent of prisoners will be reimprisoned within two years of being released.

"With research showing that the period immediately upon re-entry to the community is when offenders are at highest risk of re-offending, parole can be an extremely powerful tool in combating crime.

"Corrections Victoria funding should be directed away from increasing prison bed capacity, which will do nothing to reduce crime rates, and put towards properly resourcing parole and post-release services.

"Resources are currently limited for post release treatment and parole, with offenders facing a lack of access to ongoing drug treatment, employment and accommodation, a profound lack of understanding of parole conditions, and staff being faced with caseload 'overload'.

"If offenders are to be given a realistic chance of returning to the community as productive members, they must be provided with individualised treatment options.

Jesuit Social Services does not support the placement of statutory parole criteria. This restricts the Parole Board from using its discretion.

"Just like the proposed minimum mandatory sentencing, statutory criteria limit the ability of the Parole Board to use its extensive qualifications and experience to apply an appropriate ruling and may well lead to a further rise in prisoner numbers.

Jesuit Social Services also called for offenders in custody in the adult system up to the age of 25 to be dealt with by the Adult Parole Board through a specialised approach modelled on the Youth Parole Board.

"The Youth Parole Board provides offenders with more support, including a case worker who helps them understand their parole conditions, whereas those facing the Adult Parole Board do not receive any education on parole conditions", Ms Edwards said

**Jesuit Social Services works with over 500 young people a year, the majority of whom are high risk young people with complex and multiple problems and needs; such complex needs include mental health problems, disability (including intellectual disability), drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, and health problems.**

**Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards is available for comment.**

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