

**MEDIA RELEASE – 11 December 2013**

## **Abolition of Suspended Sentences Extends Burdening Beyond the Prison System**

Jesuit Social Services today welcomed the release of new research indicating reforms to abolish suspended sentences would be “crippling” for both Corrections Victoria and the already struggling prison system.

Acting CEO of Jesuit Social Services Sally Parnell said the study, commissioned by peak body Catholic Social Services Victoria, showed that the misplaced “tough on crime” stance of the Victorian government was having effects which spilled beyond prisons and into the broader community.

Ms Parnell said, “It is time for the government to realise the consequences of its law and order reforms including the abolition of suspended sentences.

“Desperate measures to deal with the overcrowding crisis such as the use of shipping containers as makeshift prisons, are simply not good enough.

“If the government wants to continue down this path, then it must make immediate and significant investments in support services across the entire corrections system. The current crisis will only jeopardise community safety.”

The research, *The Perfect Storm: The Impacts of Abolishing Suspended Sentences in Victoria*, was undertaken by consultant and criminologist Dr Karen Gelb, and warned the reforms would come at great financial and social cost. It found the impacts would be felt well beyond prisons, including in prosecuting services, legal aid funding, court services and among community treatment and support providers.

Ms Parnell said: “The dramatic increases that will result from abolition of suspended sentences will overwhelm services that are already stretched to capacity. Over the past year we have already seen a 4.5% increase in the daily number of offenders on community orders but only a 2.5% increase in staff numbers. This is the type of situation in which reoffending rates will increase.”

She said reforms such as the abolition of suspended sentences, ostensibly implemented to make communities safer, would in fact have the opposite effect.

“Suspended sentences provide courts with a useful tool to reflect the seriousness of a crime whilst giving an offender a better chance of effective rehabilitation than a prison term might allow,” Ms Parnell said.

“Criminal justice systems are most effective when they provide people with support to deal with the many issues that underlie their offending including mental illness, drug and alcohol issues, and a lack of education and employment.”

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**Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.**