

MEDIA RELEASE

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Victorian bail reforms miss the mark for children

The reforms to Victoria's bail laws announced by the Government today are likely to have negative impacts upon some of the most vulnerable children in our community.

Responding to Attorney-General Robert Clark's announcement that new bail laws would be introduced to Parliament this week, Jesuit Social Services' CEO Julie Edwards said, "While everyone agrees that we need to improve compliance with our bail laws, we are concerned that these changes will increase pressure on Victoria's already overcrowded prisons and have severe consequences for vulnerable children without improving the safety of our community."

Noting the reforms will make it an offence to breach bail conditions, Ms Edwards said, "In its 2007 report on bail laws, the Victorian Law Reform Commission expressly recommended against this type of reform.¹ Making it an offence to breach bail conditions has the potential to further criminalise young people. It could result in a teenager being charged for something as minor as being five minutes late for a curfew.

"We agree that authorities should have a range of options in order to deal with each person seeking bail including being able to impose conditions. As such, it is critical that we invest in bail support, with evidence from Victoria and other countries showing that these programs lead to high rates of compliance. This is particularly the case for vulnerable children who need support to comply."

Jesuit Social Services [recently completed research](#) on children and young people on bail and remand in Victoria. Ms Edwards noted the vulnerable children who will be affected by the reforms announced today, "Our research has found that children involved in the criminal justice system are among some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged within our community. We should be focusing on addressing these root causes of crime."

Noting the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2007 inquiry into bail, Ms Edwards said, "We call on the government to implement the Law Reform Commission's recommendations, in particular the introduction of specific criteria for children into the Bail Act."

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.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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¹ Recommendation 102 of the Victorian Law Reform Commissions Bail Report (2007).
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