

MEDIA RELEASE

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PLANNING FOR BASELINE SENTENCES MUST NOT PROCEED

The Baillieu Government must terminate its plans to introduce baseline sentences, Jesuit Social Services has urged in its submission to the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council (VSAC) on baseline sentencing.

Jesuit Social Services' Chief Executive Officer, Julie Edwards, said baseline sentences would increase sentence lengths and the number of prisoners at great financial cost and no benefit to the community.

"Taken together, baseline sentences, mandatory minimum sentences as announced last week, abolishing suspended sentences and home detention will place unacceptable upward pressure on already struggling legal aid services, court wait times, prison overcrowding, and rehabilitation, health and education services in prisons.

"We call on the Baillieu government to undertake full modelling on the impacts of baseline sentences on the legal, court and prison systems before any further consideration is given.

Minister for Corrections and Crime Prevention, Andrew McIntosh said during the opening of the recent Jesuit Social Services' National Justice Symposium that the Government 'have a significant problem with overcrowding in our prisons'. "Given this admission, it is extremely ill thought for the Government to implement a policy that will only increase pressure on the system" Ms Edwards said.

"It is in the best interests of community safety to, where possible, keep people out of the prison system.

"A recent study by the VSAC revealed that imprisonment 'has, at best, no effect on the rate of reoffending and often...results in a greater rate of recidivism... compared with offenders who receive a different sentencing outcome'".

In its submission, Jesuit Social Services also recommended that measures be put in place to ensure any introduction of baseline sentences does not negatively impact on the 'dual track' system for young people between the ages of 18 – 21.

"Disadvantaged and developmentally vulnerable young people are at greatest risk within the prison system. We call on the State Government to heed the evidence on what works, and not rush ahead with policy and legislation without having undertaken the necessary research and fact checking needed to inform effective policy," Ms Edwards said.

Jesuit Social Services works to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential - by partnering with community to support those most in need and working to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion. 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, please visit www.jss.org.au Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards is available for comment.

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