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BUILDING MORE JAILS NOT THE WAY TO LEAD A JOBS RECOVERY

Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, called on the Victorian Premier to drop plans to build more jails as a way of creating jobs. In the Herald Sun today, Premier Bailleu is reported as saying that new prison infrastructure would boost public safety and the economy.

However, Ms Edwards challenges this, "The evidence is clear that imprisonment has little effect on the rate of reoffending and in fact often results in a greater rate of recidivism compared with offenders who receive a different sentence, such as a community based order.

"Policies such as prevention and diversionary programs have been shown to deliver to Victoria low rates of detention, low rates of recidivism and low rates of crime. Those things are connected", said Ms Edwards, "and combine to make our communities safe.

"At a time when jurisdictions all around the world are recognising that imprisonment is an expensive option, with no impact on crime rates or community safety, the Victorian government is determined to turn back the clock by continuing to ignore the evidence and to lock up more and more people.

"Key data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare this week confirms Victoria continues to lead the nation in diverting young people from detention, with Victoria's rate of youth detention being less than half the national rate at 0.16 per 1,000 of the youth population compared with the national rate of .35.

"These outcomes are not a coincidence but the result of years of cooperation between the courts, police, non government agencies, such as ours, and the government of the day" Ms Edwards said. "In the past Victoria's approach has been driven by a commitment based on evidence that active diversion leads to reduced rates of detention and is a major step towards keeping young offenders out of the prison system," she said. "Research shows that the younger a child is placed in custody, the higher the likelihood of them serving another prison sentence in adulthood.

"This proud record is under threat, however", Ms Edwards warned. "Only this week NSW has announced further reforms to their bail laws in a push by the state government to reduce the number of young people in jail. This contrasts starkly with what's happening here.

"The more sensible approach to law and order is to fund those services which support people and communities right from the start - education, health and support services. Building more prisons as a way of creating more jobs surely is building a false economy."

Jesuit Social Services engages with young people in the youth justice and adult corrections systems – most of whom have had, or currently have, involvement with the child protection system. Jesuit Social Services works closely with these youths through the Jesuit Community College.

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