

Media release

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SENTENCING SURVEY RESULTS MUST NOT INFORM GOVERNMENT POLICY

The State Government's Sentencing Survey which reveals support for tougher sentences must not be used to inform public policy, Jesuit Social Services has warned following the release of the results today.

Jesuit Social Services' Chief Executive Officer, Julie Edwards said the Herald Sun backed survey was not representative of the Victorian community and that the call for tougher sentences posed a serious threat to community safety.

"This survey was completed by 18,000 Victorians, which only represents 0.5 per cent of the entire state population. It would be misleading for the State Government to argue that it's acting on behalf of the State by adopting harsher sentencing laws.

"We are supportive of community members sharing their views and concerns, but we cannot condone a survey which is highly flawed in its methodology.

"Respondents were only provided with a limited amount of information and do not have the same level of knowledge, information or expertise used by judges and magistrates when deciding on a sentence.

"The Sentencing Survey results are contradictory to previous research findings of the Tasmanian Jury Sentencing Study, which revealed that from a survey of jurors, 90 per cent agreed that judge's sentences were very or fairly appropriate, with more than half of those surveyed leaning towards greater leniency than the judge's sentence.

"The Sentencing Survey results support harsher penalties but in fact, it is in the best interests of community safety to, where possible, keep people out of the prison system.

"A recent study by the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council 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'.

"We urge the State Government to heed the evidence on what works and to acknowledge that the Sentencing Survey should not, under any circumstances, be used to inform effective public 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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