

MEDIA RELEASE

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Sentencing reforms to increase the cost of Victoria's criminal justice system

"The abolition of suspended sentences this year is going to add to the spiralling costs of our criminal justice system and risk making the community less safe", says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards on the release of [new research by the Sentencing Advisory Council](#).

The report examined the impacts of recent sentencing reforms in Victoria, and concluded that the partial abolition of suspended sentences had already resulted in increases to prison and community corrections numbers.

"The full abolition of suspended sentences later this year will further compound upward pressure on prison numbers, which have already grown by 25% over the past five years, over which time prison spending has increased by 63% - or an extra \$292 million a year", said Ms Edwards.

"The use of prison as a replacement for suspended sentences is concerning. Prison is expensive and does not make the community safer. In fact the evidence shows that it exacerbates many of the problems that lead people to offend in the first place.

"We know from research that community based sentences, including suspended sentences, are more effective at reducing reoffending than terms of imprisonment."

Ms Edwards noted implications of this research moving forward, "Prisons should only be used in circumstances where community safety and the interests of justice mean there is no other alternative. Instead, we must invest in overcoming the disadvantage that lies at the heart of crime, and explore community based alternatives to prison."

"This should include Victoria's Community Corrections system, which will also be placed under increased pressure when suspended sentences are fully abolished. It is vital that this system be able to support people to turn their lives around and become productive members of our community."

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.

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