

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – DECEMBER 15, 2017

New prison beds at odds with decreasing crime rates: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government’s announcement that more than 470 beds will be added to the state’s prison system, at a cost of \$345 million over three years, is a short-sighted decision that will not create safer communities says Jesuit Social Services.

“Adding new beds to the prison system is at odds with data published by the Crime Statistics Agency this week shows that a range of serious offences including property damage, theft and burglary are on a significant downward trend, and that the state has seen a large decrease in the annual crime rate and total number of offences committed,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“However this decrease has not been reflected in the number of people being locked up, which hit 7,000 people for the first time earlier this year and currently stands at 7,225.

“Increasing the capacity of the prison system is an expensive and short-sighted fix, when all of our efforts must be strengthened towards stopping people committing crimes and entering the system in the first place”.

Ms Edwards says the prison system is not reducing re-offending rates, evidenced by the Department of Justice and Regulation’s recent annual report that found 43.6 per cent of people who exit the Victorian prison system return within two years.

“Any criminal justice system must have the rehabilitation and resocialisation of people at its heart, and support people to lead productive lives which ultimately creates safer communities. The fact that close to half of people who leave the system return within two years shows that it is seriously failing in these aims”.

Recent analysis conducted by Jesuit Social Services found that spending on the Victorian prison system has increased by 197 per cent over the past decade, to a 2018 forecast of \$1.3 billion as a result of the new Ravenhall Correctional Centre.

“This \$864 million increase over the past decade could instead be spent running 230 primary schools for a year, or paying the yearly wages for more than 16,000 community mental health workers.

“Supporting people in the community to connect with education and employment is the best way to prevent people from having contact with the justice system. We need investment into services to help people onto positive pathways – not new prison beds - to ensure Victoria’s crime rate continues on a downwards trajectory and to work towards the safer communities we all want”.

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au