

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – SEPTEMBER 20, 2018

## **Mandatory sentencing laws a step backwards for Victoria: Jesuit Social Services**

The passing of new laws that will impose mandatory prison sentences on people who assault emergency services workers is a step backwards for Victoria’s criminal justice system, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We all agree that emergency services workers perform vital services in the community and should be safe at work. Mandatory sentencing is not the right way to achieve this. These laws will have a wide-reaching and harmful impact on ordinary Victorians, undermine judicial discretion and will further clog our court and prison systems,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Mandatory sentencing is a populist approach that does not improve community safety, and we oppose it in any form.

“When these laws were proposed in June we described them as poorly considered, rushed and misguided – and these terms still apply. These laws were drafted with no consultation with the legal or community services sectors, who work with marginalised people every day, and are aware of the impact these laws will have on people dealing with complex issues in the community.”

Ms Edwards says that a significant concern of the sector is that the laws will have a detrimental impact on victims of family violence, who may be reluctant to phone police if they are concerned their partner may be sent to prison.

“The Victorian Government has done some excellent work addressing and responding to family violence, including accepting all 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

“These new laws, with their threat of mandatory jail time, have the potential to undermine this work and continue to expose women and children to harm.”

Ms Edwards says that an effective criminal justice system is one where judges and magistrates can consider the individual circumstances behind each offence.

“There should never be a one-size-fits-all approach to sentencing. Our judges and magistrates must have the scope to address the factors behind each individual case and hand down a sentence that will help that person turn their life around and reduce the chance of them reoffending.

“The new laws will also impact young people aged 18 to 20, with less consideration given to their immaturity when evidence shows us that brain development continues until a person is in their late 20s.

“We need to be investing in rehabilitation programs and community-based alternatives to prison to set people in the right direction and give them a chance to contribute to society.”

**Media enquiries** – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or [kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au](mailto:kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au)