

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MAY 24, 2019

Increasing prison capacity an ineffective and costly avoidance of addressing systemic issues: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government's 2019-20 Budget announcement of more than \$1.8 billion to increase prison capacity across the state is money invested into the wrong end of the system, and the Government must also set targets to reduce the prison population and re-offending, says Jesuit Social Services.

"The serious problems around Victoria's criminal justice system are well documented. There is a record number of more than 8,200 adults in the prison system, and more than a third [38 per cent] of these people are on remand meaning they are yet to be convicted of a crime," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"It costs more than \$117,000 per year to keep someone in prison but at the same time, the prison system is clearly not meeting what should be its primary goal of rehabilitation given that more than 40 per cent of people released from prison return there within two years.

"If we add new beds to the prison system, we will fill them. The cost to Victoria – both literally and figuratively - is substantial. Instead of spending billions on new and expanded prisons in both the adult and youth systems, that money could be invested into services that work to prevent crime from occurring, from early childhood services through to education and employment pathways.

"The youth justice system is also under strain. The Government's own review of Youth Justice showed that 84 per cent of funding is spent on supervision in prisons and the community while only 15 per cent is spent on diversion and early intervention."

Ms Edwards says the prison population has ballooned as a result of regressive legislation including a presumption against bail and a move away from alternatives to jail including home detention, and that the Government must only ever use prison as a last resort.

"Enough is enough – it is time for our Government to show true leadership and commit to sustainable and evidence-based reform of our criminal justice system."

In New Zealand, both sides of Government agree that the country's prison system as a 'moral and fiscal failure' and the current Ardern Government has publicly announced a target to reduce NZ's prison population by 30 per cent over the next 15 years.

Ms Edwards says similar targets should be introduced in Victoria, in addition to targets to reduce re-offending and corresponding targets to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the criminal justice system.

"We know the way forward, which is holding people to account for their actions while supporting them to address the underlying problems behind their behaviour, instead of simply locking them up.

"Throwing money at an ineffective prison system will not succeed in the short or long term."

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