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Mobile phone ban would be cruel and inhumane: Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services has joined medical, health and human rights organisations to urge Australia’s Senators to vote against the Immigration Amendment Act (Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2020 after Federal Parliament resumes on October 6.

If the Bill passes, it will allow vital communication tools such as mobile phones and internet-capable devices to be deemed as prohibited items in immigration detention facilities. The Bill would also grant new powers for people in immigration detention to be searched, including strip searches, without a warrant.

“We are deeply aware of the painful toll of immigration detention in Australia and the significant impact this isolation and trauma has on already vulnerable people. Last year, research found that rates of self-harm in immigration detention were 200 times higher than in the broader community. It is tragic to hear of deaths, self-harm and serious mental health problems among people deeply in need of care and support,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“The passing of this Bill could have catastrophic consequences for people who are already struggling. For many people in immigration detention, mobile phones and other devices are the key way they communicate with loved ones including children, as well as legal representatives and advocates.

“Denying people access to these vital lifelines would be cruel and inhumane, and have a deeply devastating impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people our Governments are responsible for the care of.”

Ms Edwards says that people in immigration detention require additional care and support now more than ever, given visitors have not been allowed at facilities since March due to COVID-19.

“Last year, we published a report that drew on the stories and experiences of visitors within Australia’s immigration detention system, and found that these visitors provide vital friendship and support to vulnerable people in detention.

“These people have already been without face-to-face contact with friends, supporters and advocates for six months, due to the pandemic. There would never be an appropriate time to reduce and restrict contact with loved ones and the outside world, but we are disturbed that these measures are being proposed during an unprecedented global health crisis.”

“Our Senators have an opportunity to show true leadership by halting this Bill before it is too late. Australia is responsible for the security of people in immigration detention – it is also responsible for their care and wellbeing.

“We have an opportunity to uphold the dignity and human rights of vulnerable people and ensure they can retain vital connections with loved ones and supporters.”

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