

Smart Justice

"community safety the smart way"

Media Release

Abolishing suspended sentences may increase crime

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Smart Justice, a coalition of leading legal and community groups, opposes the Coalition's Bill, introduced in the opening session of Parliament yesterday, to abolish suspended sentences.

'The Baillieu Government has indicated that it wants to reduce violent crime, yet abolishing suspended sentences is counterproductive', said Smart Justice spokesperson Hugh de Kretser. 'Abolishing suspended sentences is likely to lead to a costly and unsustainable increase in the prison population without tackling the causes of crime'.

Smart Justice estimates that the move could cost taxpayers more than \$35 million a year. 'While it is difficult to predict the impact of abolishing suspended sentences on the Victorian prison population, an increase of only 10% would mean an extra 435 Victorian prisoners', said Mr de Kretser. 'An extra 435 prisoners would cost around \$35 million a year, not including the huge costs to construct new prison accommodation which could be over \$225 million –similar to the cost of building the planned new 200-bed Monash Children's Hospital'.

'Putting more people in prison diverts resources from vital social infrastructure and cost effective initiatives which have been shown to successfully address the underlying causes of crime'.

'Giving judges the option of imposing suspended sentences in appropriate cases makes much more economic sense because suspended sentences are effective, provide a wider scope for rehabilitation and treatment and are much cheaper than prison'.

'If the government is serious about reducing crime, it should focus on tackling the causes of crime by expanding early intervention court programs such as the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, which has been shown to be a cost effective way of reducing crime by linking offenders with treatment programs and support services'.

Fact sheets on suspended sentences and why more prisons are not the answer to reducing crime are available on the Smart Justice website www.smartjustice.org.au.

Further information:

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