

Media Release



Urgent action needed on young people in adult prisons

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Community legal groups have called for immediate action on vulnerable young people in Victorian prisons following a report by ABC 7.30 *Victoria* last Friday. The report detailed the placement of a 16-year-old Aboriginal young person subject to child protection in solitary confinement within the high security Charlotte Unit at the maximum security Port Phillip prison.

In addition to the 16-year-old –who has since been returned to Malmsbury detention centre – an unconfirmed number of young people are known to have been placed in the prison in response to a July escape attempt from juvenile detention in Parkville.

However, Government agencies have refused to publicly disclose the total number of young people under 18 years of age who are currently held in Victoria's adult prisons.

"There's an urgent need for a detailed Government response on this issue, together with immediate steps to ensure the safety and return to juvenile detention of all young people currently held in Victoria's adult prisons," said Federation Executive Officer, Hugh de Kretser, today.

He said an investigation was needed to determine how the young person came to be placed in solitary confinement in a maximum security adult prison, and called for transparency and rigorous independent monitoring to ensure imprisonment of young people under 18 years of age was prevented.

"There is a broad consensus that placing young people in adult prison contravenes human rights set out in Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In a case where a young person is also under child protection, the vulnerability is heightened, together with the responsibility of government to act," de Kretser said.

"Imprisoning young people in adult prisons undermines reforms identified in the Victorian Ombudsman's reports on child protection and the recent report of the Cummins inquiry on vulnerable children".

"It is no defence to suggest that crimes that have been committed or alleged in any way justify treating young people in this manner. We need a juvenile justice system that is age-appropriate, complies with the human rights of young people, and maximises the chances of rehabilitation and the prevention of future offending," de Kretser said.

Numbers of young people in adult prisons are publicly disclosed in Queensland, and they are monitored by UNICEF in countries such as Cambodia, but there are no up-to-date, publicly available figures for Victoria. Earlier this year, the Federal Government acknowledged that it was inappropriate to keep young people under 18 years of age convicted of people smuggling offences in adult prisons.

Aboriginal children and young people were significantly over-represented in both child protection and the juvenile justice system, de Kretser noted, while more research was needed on "cross-over kids" with involvement in both systems to address deep-seated and persistent disadvantage, he concluded.

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