

# Media Release



## Callinan parole measures pose safety risk, says new response to review

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Some of the parole changes being considered by the Victorian Government pose a serious risk to community safety, according to a submission sent to Corrections Minister, Edward O'Donohue, in response to the Callinan review handed down in August.

"If we are going to make changes to parole, they need to be based on evidence that they will increase community safety, not reduce it. That is a measure on which several recommendations of the Callinan review fail," said Michelle McDonnell, a senior policy adviser with the Federation of Community Legal Centres, today.

Ms McDonnell said that requiring an assessment of negligible risk before parole is granted would mean that serious offenders were denied parole but would ultimately be released into the community at the end of their sentences without supervision or conditions.

Rather, the submission, *Resourcing a stronger parole system for increased community safety*, recommends "a timely commitment of government funding to resource improvements to the Adult Parole Board and Community Correctional Services", failing which "further tragic consequences may result".

The submission finds that "a consistent theme in the reviews to date has been the deficiencies in resourcing, information and personnel systems and the risk assessment tools used". Ms McDonnell welcomed Ian Callinan's findings on these issues, but said these problems cannot be addressed without significant resources and the Government has made no commitments to resource the necessary improvements.

She said it was also deeply concerning that the proposed changes would broaden the scope of offenders caught by parole restrictions beyond those who posed a threat to the community, risking further pressure on a prison population that had increased by 40 per cent in the last decade.

"Ian Callinan's recommendations are being considered amid reports that Victoria's prison population is at breaking-point, with the Government considering a pressure-valve strategy of housing prisoners in caravans to work on chain gangs in the community.

"We say that a focus on diversion from the justice system for low-risk offenders would take the pressure off the prison system and take the pressure off parole. There also needs to be a sustained focus on policies that address the causes of crime," Ms McDonnell said.

She said that while the Government had invited responses to the Callinan review, it was unclear whether submissions would be made public to inform an appropriate public debate.

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