



The Hon Justice Beazley, AO
Supreme Court of NSW
GPO Box 3
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Justice Beazley,

NSW Government must support Computers in Cells

The Community Justice Coalition (CJC) is writing to ask you to support our proposal that Computers in Cells be provided to deliver online counselling services.

Education, legal and communication services would also become available with such a program to lessen the isolation of imprisonment, to assist rehabilitation, and thus to lower recidivism. The proven technology is safe, cheap and easily available.

Unfortunately, the government has so far been dismissive of the Computers in Cells proposal, but a Public Inquiry could establish these facts beyond question.

This rejection comes at a serious human and financial cost. Our Report *"Counting the Cost of Inaction"*¹ (see attached media release) shows that over 500 women and children could potentially have been spared domestic violence and \$110 million saved over the past year.

In response, the Government said, *"The online counselling proposal would not be appropriate without adequate support and engagement with mental health staff."*

However, at present, the mental health staff employed by the Corrective Services for counselling has an ethical conflict of interest in also reporting for release decisions. Under these circumstances, prisoners need to conceal their problems to avoid disadvantaging themselves, and are thus denied the confidential support and counselling that might be of some benefit to them. In contrast, external suppliers add choice, trust and availability at low cost.

The Government also disputed the Report's estimate of the amount of time prisoners spend in cells, but our point is that prisoners should be encouraged to make the best use of this time.

Corrective Services has failed to recognise the rehabilitative benefit of these services. The Commonwealth Report on Government Services 2017 shows that NSW has the highest rate of return to prison of any state at 50.7%, least time out of cells, highest incidence of prisoner-prisoner assaults, greatest level of overcrowding and the least money spent per prisoner per day. The State Plan to reduce recidivism by 5% in 4 years has become, in fact, an increase of 8% over that period.

Former NSW Inspector of Custodial Services John Paget recently noted² that the *"\$3.8 billion expansion of the New South Wales prison estate by 7000 beds represents a manifest and very expensive failure of public policy;"* and that this reflects the *"NSW government's lack of commitment to evidence-based criminal justice policy"*.

Furthermore, a report³ by the Auditor General of NSW found that 75% of prisoners are not receiving access to therapeutic programs before their earliest release date. The Full House Report⁴ by the Inspector of Custodial Services noted, *"The state treats inmates in a way that denies them a modicum of dignity and humanity."*

(cont'd...)

The prison system's failures need a public and accountable reset as would be provided by a Public Inquiry. We ask for your support for Computers in Cells as a first step in reforming a prison system in great need of positive change.



John Dowd AO QC
President
Community Justice Coalition

Wednesday, 2 August 2017

1 http://www.communityjusticecoalition.org/images/pdf_files/CJCCostInactionPDF.pdf

2 <http://apo.org.au/system/files/65416/apo-nid65416-24211.pdf>

3 <http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/news/therapeutic-programs-in-prisons>

4 <http://www.custodialinspector.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Full%20House%20-%20Final%20report%20April%202015.pdf>



Cost of Inaction - Prisoner Domestic Violence Online Counselling

Media Release July 17, 2017

"Today we launch a paper 'Counting the Cost of Inaction: Failure to Deliver Prisoner Domestic Violence Counselling' estimating that over 500 women and children could have been spared the traumatic effects of domestic violence if the NSW Government had accepted the free offer of online counselling for prisoners in their cells. Additionally \$110 million dollars could have been saved over the past twelve months," stated CJC President, the Hon John Dowd AO QC.

"While access to counselling programs is vital to prisoner rehabilitation, the NSW Auditor General recently found that 75% of prisoners are unable to gain entry. Online services delivered to prisoners in cells where they spend 18 hours in isolation would solve the problem of access. Such online services could provide trusted counsellors through external providers; would allow stability of service providers throughout the sentence and after release and would empower former perpetrators in self-management. These services are relatively cheap and research indicates that they can be as effective and sometimes more effective than face-to-face counselling," stated Mr. Dowd.

"This service should be available to all prisoners providing them with the social skills to deal with the disturbances of family and partner relationships after imprisonment. The financial cost of opening up these services is minimal considering the social impact it could have reducing domestic violence recidivism by up to 30%," said former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia the Hon Elizabeth Evatt AC.

Comments: John Dowd
Elizabeth Evatt