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New offences for intimidation ignore underlying factors: Jesuit Social Services

Proposed new legislation that will result in sentences of up to 10 years in jail for intimidation of a police officer, protective services officer, custodial officer or youth custodial officer fails to address the underlying factors behind tensions in the justice system, says Jesuit Social Services.

The Victorian Government yesterday introduced the *Justice Legislation (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2018* which includes a range of new offences and higher penalties aimed at protecting police and others who work in the justice system.

“Everybody has the right to be safe at work, especially those who perform vital services and keep the community safe, like police officers,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“However, new offences and harsher penalties that will impact on extremely marginalised people including young people are not the way to increase safety. They will mean more people will find themselves caught up in the revolving door of the prison system when prison should only ever be used as a last resort.”

Ms Edwards says that the best way to keep staff members, children and young in the prison system safe, and reduce the number of incidents that occur in detention, is to ensure the system operates in line with international best practice.

“In 2017, leaders from Jesuit Social Services explored innovative youth justice systems in parts of Europe and the US. What they all had in common was a focus on attracting and retaining staff members who are experienced, well-supported and skilled in trauma-informed practice and working with young people who face significant barriers to inclusion.

“For example, in Norway, youth justice staff have a minimum of two years paid training and applicants are screened for positive, humane attitudes towards working with vulnerable young people.

“This ultimately means that detention systems like the one in Norway see very few – if any – violent incidents, resulting in better outcomes for young people and safer working environments for staff.”

Ms Edwards says that detention facilities visited as part of the international tour were small, home-like and close to the families and communities of young people, which meant they were conducive to the rehabilitation of young people.

“There is a clear blueprint for what Victoria’s detention system should look like, and investments to achieve this should be matched by investments into community services to prevent crime from occurring in the first place.”

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