
MEDIA RELEASE! MEDIA RELEASE!
**CLC Tas calls for State Liberals to reconsider policy of abolishing
suspended sentences**
Friday 31st January 2014

Community Legal Centres Tasmania is calling on the Liberals to reconsider their policy of phasing out suspended sentences on the grounds that it will increase prison numbers, may increase crime and is not supported by the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute. Benedict Bartl, Policy Officer with CLC Tas stating:

We are very concerned at this policy given that it will remove judicial discretion and result in more people going to jail. By abolishing suspended sentences, many at-risk groups including younger people, people with mental illnesses and non-violent property-related offenders will be sentenced to disproportionately harsh sentences as well as learning habits in prison that will make them more susceptible to re-offending.

Whilst it is unclear how many more offenders will be sentenced to imprisonment if suspended sentences are abolished in Tasmania, the evidence from other jurisdictions provides some guidance. In New Zealand the abolishing of suspended sentences in 2002 saw an increase of 23 per cent in the first two years. Whilst, recently released statistics from the Productivity Commission demonstrate that since Victoria started phasing-out suspended sentences in 2010, the prison population has increased by 12 per cent.

Benedict Bartl, stating:

If the Liberals are serious about being tough on crime they will invest in programs that tackle the causes of crime including greater access to diversion, rehabilitation and treatment programs. By abolishing suspended sentences, the success of the Magistrate's Court Drug Diversion and Youth Justice programs would be compromised meaning an increased chance of returning to a life of crime instead of a chance at rehabilitation.

In 2008 following a review of sentencing in Tasmania, the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute recommended "...that the suspended sentence is a useful sentencing option that should be retained" as well as "there is no evidence that suspended sentences are overused or used inappropriately....".

In summary, Mr Bartl called on the State Liberals to reconsider the policy:

We call on the State Liberals to re-consider this policy which will ultimately prove counterproductive with increased numbers of prisoners, a greater chance of re-offending and a less safe community.

For further Info: Benedict Bartl – 0417 032 832 or 6223 259