

11.03.2019

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. The purpose of which is to once again put forward the case for home-detention in Queensland.

It is known that you are well aware of the issues as a result of over crowding in QLD gaols; the two most concerning issues being the continual rise in prisoner assaults and the approximately 300/pa assaults on prison officials. These are but two of the issues that I am sure you are aware of. Overcrowding was the basis for a recent meeting between Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) and the QCS staff Union, among other stakeholders.

Realistically, the government is limited in what it can do to alleviate the pressure on the system; build more infrastructure or reduce recidivism.

This letter serves to address both of the aforementioned "solutions". Please note that whilst numerous studies, news articles, and documents could be referenced herein, they are not, and are given as having been read, to keep this letter as succinct as possible.

The first solution, build more infrastructure could take on two possible directions:

- Extend existing prisons
- Build an entirely new gaol

On the surface these appear to be reasonably sound solutions. However, the initial cost, plus the ongoing costs, are extreme. The initial capital outlay in either case is astronomical. Equalled only by the ongoing costs associated with employment, training, utilities, medical, food and maintenance. This costing, along with the high rate of recidivism sees this solution as a relatively short term one, and far from cost effective. Indeed, neither solution solves the problem of over-crowding long term. They will effectively exacerbate the issue if there is not a long term solution in place. An increase in prisoner numbers (regardless of how they are accommodated) will see an exponential rise in the issues associated with over-crowding. There needs to be a program in place that deals with the high rate of recidivism across Queensland.

At the time of writing this letter, it is documented that it costs approximately \$100,000 to house a full time prisoner for 12 months. With the current system effectively being a revolving door, the obvious result is a continued increase in the costs to the government and therefore the community.

Of course, there is also the issue of prisoner health that is being compromised by the over crowding issues. Treating the increase in prisoner assaults as a given, there is the issue of prisoners sleeping on concrete floors, with their head no more that 45 centimetres away from an ageing toilet system. Surely this can not be seen as healthy. Queensland is not a third world state, so why should

its prisoners be treated in such a way, with two or three people being crammed into a cell designed for one. This only scratches the surface of the health issues, the massive number of prisoners who now suffer chronic back pain, rampant skin infections and bed sores from being locked down for so long each day, are only three more of the obvious health concerns that are increasing on a daily basis. This in turn, places more stress on the system.

Currently in QLD Low security prison farms, "double-up" cells are being rolled out in an effort to alleviate some of the pressure on the high security gaols. This is leading to more issues being encountered at the prison farms. At the time of writing this letter, at least one of the prison farms is under very strict water restrictions because the water source can not cope with the increase in numbers. The restrictions see all water to the showers in every unit turned off all day except 2 hours in the late afternoon/evening. This means that grown men, having worked all day in the QLD heat can not shower until two and a half hours after they finish work. As is the case across most units, the water is turned off again before the 30 men have all had a chance to shower. This also means that when the men have visits with loved ones, they can not have a shower before hand.

The now over crowded low security prison farms are seeing an increase in assaults and escapes. This is a direct result of the over crowded system, the prisoners are finding it extremely difficult to cope under such conditions. Surely there is a better way to alleviate the pressures on the over crowded prison system. That would be a home-detention program.

The rate of recidivism is known to be very high in QLD. This writer has seen this first hand over the past 30 months, with countless prisoners being released, only to re offend and be once again locked up. Over half of the current prison population has been incarcerated previously. There is no policy or program in place that effectively deals with this problem. Most of the recidivist prisoners are being released with little or no money, this effectively forces their hand into re-offending behaviour. Having a work release program would alleviate this issue, or greatly reduce it at least.

Studies both domestically and internationally show that an effective way to decrease recidivism is to introduce a version of home-detention (either full time home-detention or a work release home-detention program). The majority of states and Territories in Australia have a policy of home-detention in one form or another, and all have seen positive results. The reason this works to reduce recidivism is because the prisoners are being released to work, therefor the issue of not having money is immediately addressed. Studies show that people in the workforce are much less likely to adopt offending behaviour.

Introduced under very strict guidelines (one strike; monitoring; reporting; and drug and alcohol testing for example) and a very stringent vetting program; home detention can, and will assist in the reduction of recidivism. Thereby not only addressing the immediate issues associated with prison over crowding, but by reducing the recidivism rate, will continue to alleviate pressures on the system in the long term.

It is not this writers opinion that home-detention should be a front end sentencing option. Indeed it needs to be the final step in the natural progression through the system. From a high

security classification, to a medium level (housed in residential sections of the gaols), to a classification of low, and finally, after a period of time (50% - 75% of the non-parole period served for example) and other goals being met, home-detention.

Using a common, low security prisoner as an example of the suggested progress an inmate would take:

- Commonwealth offender, having committed fraud.
- Non SVO (serious violent offender).
- Served at least 50%-75% of the minimum, non-parole period.
- Remained breach and incident free.
- Achieved, and maintained a Low security classification for a majority of their sentence.
- Accommodated at Low security prison farm.
- Progressed to Work-Camps (Work Camps see offenders working largely unsupervised in communities).
- The next obvious step would be a form of home-detention, until they are eligible for parole.

The benefits of home-detention include the reduced cost of housing an inmate; the ability for the offender to work and therefore contribute to the community and contribute to any reparation order in place. Home-detention could be self-funded by the inmate, or at least subsidised, thereby seeing a further burden on the community reduced. A reduced rate of recidivist behaviour, and a long term solution to the over-crowding in QLD gaols.

For home-detention to be reintroduced into QLD, it would require a policy change, hence this letter. I trust that you can see the positives associated with a home-detention program. I am well aware that home-detention poses potential risks. This is where the strict vetting and ongoing restrictions would help to alleviate those risks. Taking into account the increased frequency and severity of the assaults on inmates and prison staff, as a direct result of over crowding, surely the mitigated risk to the community is outweighed.

I sincerely appreciate the time you have taken to read this letter, and to consider its contents. I look forward to your reply, and hope to be able to correspond further to see the issue of over-crowding alleviated by way of the most cost-effective program, i.e. Home-detention.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Hurst
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