
Media Release

EMBARGOED until
1am Thursday 6 November 2008

Incarceration: unsustainable costs and diminishing returns

Today OARS SA is releasing its report on the unsustainable costs and diminishing benefits associated with getting tough on crime. SACOSS has prepared a report on behalf of OARS SA to highlight the large drain on the State's budget associated with the criminal justice policy of "Pack Em, Rack Em and Stack Em", and more importantly, the diminishing benefits associated with such policy.

OARS SA CEO Leigh Garrett said, "There is a diminishing return on these expenditures, and we have reached a point where effective treatment and rehabilitation for prisoners can no longer be assured. The end result is that people released from prison are very likely worse off after their incarceration, and are released into the community with a higher chance of re-offending. Victims are going to be at greater risk. The UK and the US are already facing these issues."

"The purpose of this report is to outline the enormous cost burden being carried by the community of South Australia to maintain an increasingly ineffective criminal justice system," he said.

Karen Grogan, SACOSS Executive Director, said "Incarceration in South Australia is escalating, and our already overextended criminal justice system is beginning to shudder under the weight of prison overcrowding and the skyrocketing costs of over-incarceration and longer sentences."

"There is significant reliance on a retributive focus both to control and deter criminal behaviour, without any corresponding evidence demonstrating its effectiveness. Unfortunately, and despite the lack of empirically sound evidence to the success of any such system, the current South Australian Government is maintaining and promoting an increasingly punitive criminal justice system" she says.

The report, entitled *Incarceration: unsustainable costs and diminishing returns*, highlights many issues of concern. Key amongst them is the rising cost, both financial and social, of South Australia's unsustainably increasing rate of incarceration. South Australia now has the nation's highest rate of incarceration.

Key data contained in the report include:

- In 2006 it cost \$170 per day to house a prisoner in **South Australia**. By 2007, that figure had risen over 8% to \$185 per day and \$67,525 per annum.
- At current rates we can expect an increase of an extra 120 prisoners per year. Therefore in 2018 there will be approximately 3082 prisoners in South Australia. **To accommodate 3082 prisoners at an annual cost of \$124,633 per prisoner, will amount to \$384,118 million of the Law and Justice Budget.**
- There is a substantial cost saving for government to develop, maintain and appropriately resource restorative justice processes and diversionary processes.

- International studies have demonstrated a lower recidivism rate in those offenders who have attended restorative processes than in those who received more traditional forms of punishment.

Mr Garrett and Ms Grogan call upon the State Government to engage with groups such as OARS SA and SACOSS to explore alternatives to incarceration that are more likely to have a greater impact and reduce costs.

Download the report from www.oars.org.au and www.sacoss.org.au/publications

FOR COMMENT CONTACT:

Leigh Garrett, CEO OARS SA 0413 941 200

Karen Grogan, Executive Director SACOSS 0418 805 426