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A Community Legal Centre

MEDIA RELEASE

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'No Consultation Criminal Law Sentencing Reforms'

New sentencing laws have been passed by the lower house following two hours of debate, and will be rushed through the upper house imminently, allowing no opportunity for community and stakeholders to comment.

These changes have been touted as 'tough on crime' and as supporting reduced recidivism by tackling the causes of crime.

Between the years 2000 and 2010 the number of women imprisoned in Victoria has increased by 68%, with an increase of 30% in the last 18 months alone. The number of men imprisoned annually in Victoria has grown also, expanding from around 3400 to 4300 in the last five years.

Given the overall decrease in crime in Victoria, there is a great need for evidence based discussion around sentencing laws in Victoria. Research by the Sentencing Advisory Council to the Brumby Government has clearly shown that community attitudes to sentencing are greatly influenced by the breadth of information made available to them.

The cost to the community of prioritizing punitive interventions and in particular imprisonment of offenders is a decision making process that ought to be inclusive and based on informed debate.

The impact of imprisonment on rehabilitation prospects has been a consistent factor in the handing down of suspended sentences.

Robin Inglis Executive Officer of the Fitzroy Legal Service says –

“In many cases keeping a person out of prison can make the community safer. This reality and the cost to the community of imprisonment, rarely takes centre stage in tough on crime debates.”

The raft of extensive changes proposed by the Sentencing Amendment Bill 2010 should at the very least be stalled to allow opportunity for meaningful community debate and discussion.

For further comment contact:

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