

Amanda Honeyman

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 20 January 2012 3:12 PM
To: Legal Affairs Police Corrective Services and Emerg Svc Committee
Subject: Submission to Legal Affairs, Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services Committee
Importance: High

Dear Committee Members

My name is Maureen Reid.

I was originally a primary school teacher in the 1960s when women were required to resign if they married. I had four children and later enrolled as a mature age student in the Bachelor of Social Work degree course at the University of Queensland.

I worked in the (then) Department of Children's Services, hospitals, women's refuges and for about eight years in Queensland Health (Community Health).

Now retired, with my husband, an Engineering graduate and retired Senior Executive in Telstra, I have been involved with prisoners for the past seven years. We have considerable knowledge of six Queensland prisons, having visited, talked with prisoners and their families, some prison officers, mental health workers and other regular visitors to prisons. I have also had significant contact with people who work with parolees and ex prisoners. We intend to continue our involvement with parolees and ex prisoners.

We have many observations to make about the tremendous wastage of resources that is inherent in our present prison industry. We know there are well-intentioned people and programs that are genuinely trying to rehabilitate prisoners in these institutions. Overall, it appears that prisoners most likely to be rehabilitated are those who have had at least some previous integration into our society, eg they have had some education, and some stabilizing influences in their past lives, such as family or other role models.

Those at the bottom of the socio-economic "ladder" such as many indigenous people, those persons who have been in the Guardianship of various State Governments for most of their lives, people who have come from other cultures and who often have been traumatized in war-torn countries, and severely mentally ill persons who have not had or been able to respond to adequate treatment are "losers" in the present system and unlikely to be rehabilitated inside prisons. The latter category of mentally ill persons often includes those previous categories of persons who were in long-term State guardianship, refugees and especially our own indigenous people. From our observations, these groups comprise most of the prison population.

These people are usually significantly harmed by the prison process. Prolonged imprisonment causes further damage to themselves and to their unfortunate families, often leading to further alienation from society and recidivism.

The Sentencing Advisory Council, which has access to significant information about the prison industry, is opposed to mandatory non-parole periods. Our prisons are a huge and increasing cost to the economy. We do not understand why the clear evidence of this cannot be provided to the general community in a reasonable manner, while still recognizing the need for some prison places for those persons who are a real and continued danger to the community.

We are opposed to this proposed legislation because of our seven year personal education about the prison industry. We know that this would further increase prison populations of the most

disadvantaged and mentally ill persons in our society. There are already significant hurdles for prisoners applying for parole.

There are many cost-effective and common sense alternative uses of resources to assist prisoners to complete their parole periods and later lives without breaches or recidivism. These resources we believe reflect a civilized concern for a fairer society and would be less costly and have a greater chance of rehabilitating prisoners. To increase the numbers in our already crowded prisons by mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment seems opposed to any logical political analysis of costs and benefits, even if, sadly, social justice aspects are ignored. This is such an important issue for a "civilized" community that it needs honest debate and leadership from those in positions of power.

Yours faithfully
Maureen Reid, B.Soc.Wk

