




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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ADJOURNMENT

Gatton, Women's Correctional Facility

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (6.18 pm): I rise to call on Labor to abandon its plan for a new privatised women's prison at Gatton. Creating a private prison industry means there are a whole new set of vested interests in keeping people locked up. I call on Labor to scrap this plan and take the prison into public hands. I would like to applaud the actions of four brave activists who lay down on the road at Gatton this week in an act of civil disobedience to protest the new prison.

Queensland prisons do not do a very good job of rehabilitating people at the moment. It is crucial that governments recognise that poverty, homelessness, mental health issues and drug addiction are the underlying factors that contribute to criminalisation and overimprisonment. It is well established that building more cells and opening more prisons will ultimately not fix overcrowding problems. Providing adequate economic security, health care, education and social services for disadvantaged groups at risk of criminalisation is more effective than locking up ever more people.

It is estimated 40 per cent of women in Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre are on remand, meaning they are yet to be sentenced. It is not in the public's interest to lock these women up. Overcrowding concerns could be addressed by better providing support for these women who are eligible for bail. Labor is also planning on building an entirely new prison near Wacol. The business plan has been made public for this 1,004-bed prison that will cost \$660 million. That is more than the Queensland government will spend on building new social housing this year. It is more than it will spend on remote Indigenous housing. It is more than it will spend on child safety officers. It is more than it will spend on Legal Aid and DV services put together. Overcrowding is a serious issue, especially in women's prisons, but the solution to over-imprisonment is to reduce the number of people behind bars, not build new cells. Providing adequate economic security, good health care, education and social services for disadvantaged groups at risk of criminalisation is more effective than locking people up.

As well as those basic necessities, as we have heard from a former chief of Queensland Corrective Services, we should be looking at legalising and regulating cannabis since 27 per cent of all offences in Queensland are illicit drug offences. One way to help ease the over-imprisonment crisis in the adult system is to stop people from getting trapped in the cycle of disadvantage and criminalisation to begin with. The Greens support the calls from Sisters Inside, Change the Record, Amnesty International and many others to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years. Raising the age would help fix our shocking and obscene over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. Of all the 10- to 17-year-olds behind bars in Queensland in 2013-14, 65 per cent were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kids. Kids belong with their families, not in prison.

I finish by expressing my condolences and deep sorrow at hearing the news that this morning a woman passed away at the Brisbane women's correctional facility. Any death in state custody is tragic. There is limited information available at this stage, but we have to remember that in our struggles for a more humane and just society we cannot forget that individuals and families caught up in the systems we create and maintain in this parliament all too often pay a terrible price.