



MEDIA RELEASE – JUNE 6, 2023

## **Queensland must to commit to evidence-based justice reform: Jesuit Social Services**

While some Australian jurisdictions are taking positive steps towards more humane, evidence-based approaches towards children and young people who have contact with the criminal justice system, Queensland is going backwards with regressive laws that will not support stronger, more cohesive communities, says Jesuit Social Services.

“Jesuit Social Services has worked with children and young people who have contact with the justice system for more than 45 years. We know that an effective system is one that works to prevent crime from occurring in the first place, emphasises rehabilitation for those people who do have contact, and only ever uses prison as a last resort,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“It is deeply concerning to see Queensland go down the same path that has been tried and failed in other parts of the country by introducing laws that will only criminalise more children, take them away from their families and communities, and increase the likelihood of them having further contact with the justice system throughout adulthood.”

Recent data published by the Productivity Commission found that Queensland had the highest youth recidivism rate in the country and the highest average number per day of young people under supervision orders.

“Earlier this year, the Queensland Government overrode its own Human Rights Act to make breach of bail an offence for children. So-called tough-on-crime policies like this do nothing to support vulnerable children to address the underlying problems behind their behaviour. In fact, the Northern Territory’s Royal Commission found no evidence that making breach of bail a crime deters young people from offending, with these findings consistent with learnings from other states,” says Ms Edwards.

“It was recently reported that almost 300 breach of bail charges have been laid against children in the first two months of these laws coming into effect, and that two-thirds of these children are Indigenous. We urge the Queensland Government to repeal these laws and commit to evidence-based reforms, including raising the age of criminal responsibility, that give children a chance to flourish in the community.”

Leaders from Jesuit Social Services have previously explored effective adult and youth justice systems across parts of Europe, the US and New Zealand as part of its #JusticeSolutions tours. Ms Edwards said there is much Queensland can learn from international best practice.

“The strong and effective systems we observed highlighted the need to only ever use detention as a last resort, and of supporting people to address their individual and often complex needs.

“There is still plenty of work to be done around the country to give all children the best opportunity to thrive, but we have seen some positive steps with a number of states and territories committing to raise the age of criminal responsibility and investments into diversion and restorative justice which hold children accountable for their behaviour in the community, not detention. We call on Queensland to follow the lead of others and commit to helping, not harming, children.”

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