

MEDIA RELEASE – AUGUST 16, 2023

Bail reform a welcome step in the right direction: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government’s introduction of laws to reform the state’s bail system is a welcome step towards ensuring the criminal justice system keeps people who pose no risk to the community away from the harms of the prison system and supports them to reset their lives in community, says Jesuit Social Services.

“Jesuit Social Services welcomes the Victorian Government’s bail law reforms, which will mean people who do not pose a risk to community safety receive bail where it is appropriate and are not needlessly incarcerated. This will ultimately prevent more people from becoming entrenched in the harmful and ineffective prison system,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“We acknowledge the tenacious efforts of the family of Veronica Nelson, whose tragic death catalysed these reforms. Jesuit Social Services and those in the community and legal fraternities have long advocated for a more effective and compassionate bail system.”

The death of 37-year-old Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman Veronica Nelson in 2020 after her arrest for shoplifting offences led to a coronial inquiry that described Victoria’s bail laws as discriminatory and a ‘complete, unmitigated disaster’ and urged their reform.

Ms Edwards says the new laws will contribute to reducing Victoria’s growing prison population, which has doubled over the last 10 years – in part by larger numbers of people on remand since changes were introduced to the bail system in 2017 and 2018.

“We have long been concerned about Victoria’s prison population and the state’s reliance on incarceration over effective community-based alternatives. Given 44 per cent of people who exit the prison system return within two years, it is clear that imprisonment is ineffective at helping people to address the underlying issues behind their offending. We urge the Victorian Government to re-introduce alternative sentencing options such as home detention and suspended sentences, which will support people to be accountable for their behaviour in the community and ensure prison is only ever used as a last resort.”

Jesuit Social Services supports Ms Nelson’s family’s call for Poccum’s Law, which has four key bail-related asks: remove the presumption against bail, grant access to bail unless there is a serious and immediate safety risk, remove all bail offences, and ensure a person is not remanded if they are unlikely to receive a sentence of imprisonment.

The organisation additionally calls on the Victorian Government to develop state-wide alternatives to custody for people with short sentences, legislate for a presumption against short-term prison sentences, and further reform bail laws to make it easier to get bail.

“Expanding alternative sentencing options would not only reduce the number of people in prison, but give those who have contact with the justice system the opportunities and support they need to turn their lives around,” says Ms Edwards.



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“This would keep people safe from the harm of the prison system, and support the stronger, more cohesive communities we all want.”

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au