

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government backflip on bail reform risks entrenching teens in justice system: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government's backflip on promised bail reform and the announced plan to trial electronic monitoring for young people on bail do not support the evidence of what works in reducing re-offending, and will only further entrench marginalised young people in the criminal justice system, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We are disappointed the Victorian Government has turned its back on important reform to bail laws that would steer teens away from further contact with the criminal justice system," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"By maintaining the current system more children and young people will be detained unnecessarily. Evidence shows this can lead to further contact as adults and re-offending at higher rates.

"We must ensure that prison is only ever used as a last resort. Wherever possible, children and young people must be supported in the community to address the underlying issues behind their offending, and connected with education, family and the broader community.

"This decision will condemn more children to unnecessary and harmful justice system involvement, and won't result in less crime, fewer victims or stronger communities."

Ms Edwards is also concerned about the Victorian Government's plan to trial electronic monitoring for young people on bail.

"Research has demonstrated that electronic monitoring does not contribute to a reduction in reoffending. There is no evidence that it will serve as a deterrent to others. Visible electronic bracelets are stigmatising, and can lead to disengagement from school and other pro-social activities.

"We are concerned about the disproportionate impact this surveillance will have on children who are already over-represented in the justice system, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people involved with the out-of-home care system, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

"Young people on bail need intensive support to address the underlying reasons for their behaviour, which often include disengagement from education, mental health problems and substance use problems, not further punitive measures that prevent them from leading productive lives.

"We urge the Victorian Government to look at the evidence on what works in preventing crime and helping young people to reach their full potential in the community. Our political leaders must commit to evidence-based change if they want to genuinely build the stronger and more cohesive communities we all want to be part of."

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