

MEDIA RELEASE – APRIL 15, 2026

### **Plan to jail even more children won't reduce youth crime: Jesuit Social Services**

The Victorian Opposition's plan to expand the already concerning 'adult time for violent crime' laws to cover twice as many offences, should it win November's state election, would be a backwards step and fail to reduce youth crime from occurring in the first place, says Jesuit Social Services.

"Endlessly locking up children is a shortsighted, cruel and unsustainable way to go about community safety," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"We know from our nearly 50 years of experience working with the young people who are at the centre of this, that jail is proven not to work as a deterrent to reoffending, it does nothing to avoid the initial crime and only makes children more likely to commit further crimes in the future.

"We all want less crime and fewer victims – but what is often lost in conversations to address youth crime is the evidence of what works in preventing crime from occurring and supporting young people who do commit crimes onto more positive pathways to prevent further harm.

"This means investing more into restorative practice and early intervention work to keep young people engaged with education, family and positive role models in the community, rather than a costly and ineffective detention system that increases, rather than decreases, the likelihood of further harm."

Ms Edwards says that more than 60 per cent of children in detention are victims of abuse, neglect or trauma; around half have had contact with the child protection system and close to half have experienced family violence.

"This raises the critical question – what are we doing to address this and other underlying drivers of offending, instead of relying solely on costly and ineffective punitive responses? Last year's State Budget invested \$727m into prison expansion, where is the similar investment into prevention, early intervention and restorative justice programs?

"In an election year, we are very concerned that the Victorian Government and Opposition are committing to laws which could see children aged 14 sentenced to life in prison, as part of a race to the bottom around law and order. Community safety and the fundamental rights of children are at risk of being written off as collateral damage to political point scoring, and we all deserve better than that from our representatives in parliament," says Ms Edwards.

"We urge the opposition to reconsider this harmful policy and instead look to how we can intervene on the causes and conditions that generate crime – something the government should also be prioritising."



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Jesuit Social Services has put forward a number of evidence-based recommendations to the State Government in its [2026-27 Victorian Pre-Budget Submission](#).

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