



JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

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The announcement by the Queensland Government to build a new men's prison near Gatton is disappointing and short sighted.

PLS acknowledges the significant difficulties faced by Queensland Corrective Services in managing chronic overcrowding in Queensland prisons. This overcrowding has been caused by the unprecedented increase in the prison population, which has risen by 44% between 2012 and 2018.

However, building new prisons is not the solution.

The Queensland Productivity Commission (QPC) is currently conducting an Inquiry into Imprisonment and Recidivism. The Summary Report released by the QPC in February 2019 made the following key points:

- Underlying rates of crime have been steadily falling for the past 20 years
- The median prison term is 3.9 months and most (65%) are for non-violent offences
- It costs around \$107,000 to accommodate a prisoner for a year and indirect costs on families and communities are estimated at \$40,000 per year

The QPC has identified 4 preliminary key areas of reform to address the increasing rate of imprisonment in Queensland. None of them recommend building new prisons.

Prisoners are amongst the most disadvantaged members of our society. They are disproportionately represented by Indigenous Australians and people experiencing homelessness, mental illness and cognitive impairment. Prisons exacerbate poverty, homelessness, isolation and mental illness, creating a cycle of disadvantage that only contributes to the underlying causes of incarceration. There are also significant numbers of people in custody because they cannot access suitable accommodation in the community.

Building a new prison in response to an increasing prison population is a last resort and an acknowledgment of failure.

PLS calls on the State Government to invest this money in long term solutions to addressing the increasing prison population. These solutions include creating safe accommodation for people coming out of prison, adopting more effective ways to deal with crime and providing meaningful legal and throughcare support to vulnerable people who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

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