



PRISONERS' LEGAL SERVICE INC CHAINMAIL

INFORMATION BROADSHEET FOR PRISONERS OF QUEENSLAND

102nd Edition December 2016

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

CHILD SUPPORT RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN YOU ENTER PRISON

The Financial Counselling Service at PLS receives regular enquiries and requests for assistance from prisoners with Child Support Agency (CSA) debts and ongoing assessments.

Prisoners can contact the Child Support Agency on the ARUNTA phone system or write to them directly to Child Support Agency GPO Box 9815 MELBOURNE VIC 3001. We recommend that if you are a prisoner with an ongoing child support liability, to contact the CSA as soon as possible when you enter prison.

The CSA calculate the liability based on prior income records, so when you enter prison, you need to contact them to have the liability reduced to reflect your circumstances. Most prisoners are eligible to have the liability reduced to NIL or to the minimum amount, which for 2016 is approximately \$8.00 per week or (\$414.00 per year).

The CSA also have to recalculate your income and your assessment every 12 to 15 months, sometimes more often. This means that if you are in prison for more than 1 year, you need to contact the CSA regularly to make sure you remain on your NIL or minimum assessment. If you don't contact the CSA or only contact them once, you can accrue large CSA debts while in prison.

Please note that if you have a child support debt, or an ongoing liability that you cannot afford to pay, a late payment penalty will be charged every month. This is currently \$56.57 per month. This is an automated charge applied by the CSA and does not have to be paid. If and when you are able to pay your maintenance debt off, once the debt has been reduced to nil, you can contact the CSA and ask for the late payment penalties to be cleared. This is because the late penalties are an administrative fee and the money does not go to the other parent/guardian.

Please note that Child Support Agency debts cannot be cleared by bankruptcy so this is not an option if your only debt is child support.

You can also complete a CSA Representative Authority Form if you want someone else to contact them on your behalf.

HOW CAN THE FINANCIAL COUNSELLOR HELP?

We recommend you contact the CSA yourself as soon as possible. However, if you are having difficulties, the financial counsellor can assist you. You can nominate the financial counsellor to act on your behalf, and we can then contact the CSA investigate your old debts, check your current liability and assist you to have it amended to the appropriate amount. You can contact us on the PLS advice line or in writing.



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SAFE WAY HOME ADVOCATE

My name is Kate Black and I am the Safe Way Home Advocate at Prisoners' Legal Service. The Safe Way Home Program offers assistance to prisoners with parole matters.

The role of the Advocate is different to that of a Solicitor. An Advocate is someone who assists people to put their case forward for them to be heard but not in a legal context. As my background is as a Social Worker and Counsellor for people in prison, I greatly enjoy working with clients through Prisoners' Legal Service to identify goals and strategies to achieving them. As developing relapse prevention plans is an important part of a parole application, it has been great to use these skills to help individuals make a plan that will hopefully assist them in transitioning back into the community.

This year, Prisoners' Legal Service received some additional funding to enable me to visit Lotus Glen, Townsville and Capricornia Prisons on a regular basis. Since June, I have had the pleasure of visiting each of these Centres on two occasions. I have been able to conduct 22 sessions on how to apply for parole and provided 188 face to face sessions to prisoners in Northern Prisons to assist them with their barriers to accessing the parole process.

Myself and Prisoners' Legal Service want to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy Christmas and the very best for 2017. We hope that the new year holds increased happiness and successes for you.

PLS HOLIDAY CLOSURE

Please note that PLS will be closed for the Christmas and New Year holidays from Monday 19 December 2016 to Monday 2 January 2017. We will **reopen on Tuesday 3 January 2017**.

Unfortunately, during this short holiday period we will not be able to operate the Prisoner Advice Line. However, you may continue to write to PLS at: GPO Box 257, Brisbane QLD 4001.

We will respond to letters and recommence the free advice line on the ARUNTA systems from 3 January 2017.