



JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

PRISONERS' LEGAL SERVICE INC

CHAINMAIL

INFORMATION BROADSHEET FOR PRISONERS OF QUEENSLAND

120th Edition – December 2019

Changes to PLS Telephone Advice Line

In our previous edition of Chainmail, we outlined changes to our mail service. In this edition, we will explain changes to our telephone advice line that will start in **January 2020**. These changes have been designed to improve access to PLS. We hope they will result in more prisoners' calls being answered. In 2021, PLS will review the changes to identify if the new system is working.

In 2018/19, PLS missed more than **15,000 calls** on our telephone advice line. This is because we do not have enough funding to employ more than one person to answer calls. PLS recently completed a review into our advice line where we looked at how many calls were being made, what times prisoners were calling, and which prisons they were calling from.

The review showed that:

- Many prisoners are trying to call our advice line at the same time.
- There are quiet periods during the advice line hours where very few prisoners try to call.
- Prisoners at some centres are having more success getting through than other centres.

PLS spoke to Queensland Corrective Services to find out why there are quiet periods during our advice line. They explained that the quiet periods are happening because industry areas in different centres work split shifts (morning and afternoon). We also believe the quiet periods often relate to muster.

Our advice line previously ran from all prisons on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9am and 1pm. The advice line hours and days will now depend on which prison you are accommodated in. Ask QCS staff after 13 January 2020 what days and times our advice line operates at your correctional centre.





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QSAC Highlights Possible Changes to Sentencing and Parole in QLD

In July 2019, the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council (QSAC) released a report into *Community-Based Sentencing Orders, Imprisonment and Parole Options*. PLS was invited to participate in roundtable discussions where we advocated for changes to the laws about court ordered parole. These changes were also supported by academics from the UQ School of Law.

The QSAC report made the following **recommendations** relevant to the parole system:

Court powers where court ordered parole order automatically cancelled

Generally, where a court sets a parole release date (**court ordered parole**) you will be released from custody on that date. Where the Court instead sets a parole eligibility date (**board ordered parole**) you are required to make an application for parole which will be considered by the Parole Board. A court ordered parole order will be automatically cancelled if you are sentenced to another period of imprisonment for an offence committed during the parole order.

Currently, where a person's court ordered parole order is cancelled (automatically or by the Parole Board) the Court is **not** allowed to set a new parole release date. The Court can only set a parole eligibility date. Even if a person is given an immediate parole eligibility date, they must still make an application to the Parole Board and wait for it to be considered. QSAC recommends that where court ordered parole has been automatically cancelled because of new charges, the court should still be able to set a parole release date.

Raising the cap for court ordered parole

Currently, the Court can either set a parole release date or a parole eligibility date only where the head sentence is less than 3 years. QSAC has recommended that this cap be lifted so that the Court may set a parole release date (court ordered parole) for sentences of up to 5 years.

Removing parole for short sentences

QSAC has also recommended that parole not be applicable to sentences shorter than 6 months. If implemented, these sentences would instead be served in full, partially suspended, or wholly suspended and served in the community. QSAC considers that this change will keep more people out of custody and ease pressure on the Parole Board.

PLS is pleased to see that QSAC has taken community submissions on board in compiling its report. **The report contains only recommendations and does not alter the law in QLD.** The government has not yet indicated whether it will implement any of the recommendations. PLS will continue to update prisoners and to provide current advice to prisoners on parole matters.

