



PRISONERS' LEGAL SERVICE INC

CHAINMAIL

INFORMATION BROADSHEET FOR PRISONERS OF QUEENSLAND

113th Edition October 2018

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

YEAR IN REVIEW – 2017-2018

Challenges to Funding

The Prisoners Legal Service Inc, like most community legal centres, faces an ongoing struggle to meet the demands of its ever-growing client base. Prisoner numbers in Queensland continue to grow and it is difficult to see this sad trend reversing in the immediate future. The service has recorded a significant number of prisoners seeking advice on a range of prison issues. This significant increase in such requests have led to PLS having to develop criteria on which consideration is given to those most vulnerable prisoners. An unfortunate consequence of the ever-growing workload is that the Service cannot respond to all issues raised.

Current funding received by the PLS has grown little to allow PLS to provide services to the ever-increasing prison population. For example, in this current funding cycle, prisoner numbers have increased by 1,526. (2016 - 7,318 prisoners; 2018 – 8,844 prisoners). With the increase in prisoner numbers comes a greater strain on the limited resources of the Service.

At 30 June 2018, Queensland's built cell capacity was:	At 30 June 2018 Queensland's prison population was:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low Security — 815 built beds;• High Security — 6382 built beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low security population — 649;• Secure population — 8195

This means as at 30 June 2018: -

- The secure population was 1813 prisoners above capacity, resulting in 3626 prisoners sharing a cell designed for one prisoner; and
- The low security population of 649 was accommodated by 815 beds.

In the last 14 months, the PLS has witnessed a number of significant consequences within correctional centres which have, as their causation, a link to the overcrowding now experienced across the State's correctional centres. Such consequences include: -

- Increase in the number of prisoner on prisoner assaults;
- Increase in the number of prisoner on correctional officer assaults/incidents;
- Increase in property damage;
- Increase in the number of prisoners being unable to access educational/vocational courses;
- Increase in time delays for family members to visit; and
- Increase in number of prisoners on "waiting lists" for treatment; and Increase in the use of prolonged maximum-security orders.

The above list is by no means exhaustive but is indicative of the negative consequences of prolonged overcrowding. PLS seeks to proactively advocate the State Government and Queensland Correctional Services to develop and implement policies that seek to address the significant concerns caused by prisoner overcrowding.



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Human Rights and Prisoners with a Disability

In 2017-2018, PLS took part in a landmark report prepared by the Human Rights Watch entitled "I needed help, instead I was punished". This report highlighted the neglect of prisoners with disabilities in Australia.

PLS provided many of the case stories that were included in the report. The report itself highlighted the harsh reality of the often-inhuman treatment of persons with disabilities within correctional centres. The report noted:

- People with disabilities, particularly a cognitive or psychosocial disability, are overrepresented in the criminal justice system in Australia—comprising around 18 percent of the country's population, but almost 50 percent of people entering prison.
- Due to the lack of support and reasonable accommodation, prisoners with psychosocial or cognitive disabilities, in particular can find it extremely challenging to understand prison rules and follow instructions. As a result, they are at higher risk of violating the rules and of facing violence from other prisoners and staff. Difficult conditions of confinement—such as sharing cells due to overcrowding, a lack of accessible toilets or showers, and negative staff attitudes—can present additional physical and psychological challenges for people with disabilities.

Prisoners with a psychosocial or cognitive disability can spend weeks or months locked in solitary confinement in detention, or crisis or safety units, for 22 hours or more a day. Human Rights Watch found that prisoners can spend years in prolonged solitary confinement in Maximum Security Units (MSU); one man with a psychosocial disability has spent more than 19 years in the MSU. PLS believes that the use of solitary confinement in our correctional centres must be stopped and it will continue to advocate strongly for the end of the use of solitary confinement for prisoners with disabilities.

PLS Bail Support Project

In December 2016, after approaches from the GEO Group General Manager, PLS submitted a proposal for the provision of a bail advice service to the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre (AGCC). Under the proposal, the PLS offered to provide a six-month trial to undertake a bail advice service for persons on remand at AGCC. The advice service was to be delivered on site at the AGCC and was to include: -

- Face to Face advice sessions with remand prisoners every Monday and Friday from 8am- 12pm;
- Training to nominated bail clerks; and
- Development of appropriate resources to assist remand prisoners in self-represented bail applications

The principle objectives of the service are to:

- Improve remand prisoner access to legal advice on matters pertaining to bail and bail applications;
- Improve knowledge and expertise of bail clerks to provide a better internal service to remand prisoners on matters pertaining to bail;
- Improve standards of self-represented bail applications; and
- Reduce the number of prisoners on remand by having worthy applicants in the community on bail.

The trial commenced in January 2017 and was extended for a further 12 months in September 2017.