



New inquiry—Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system

A new inquiry has been adopted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The terms of reference will look at the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system.

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin has called for this inquiry to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the justice system.

The Chair of the Committee Bob Debus MP stated: ‘The percentage of Indigenous Australians in jail is deeply disturbing. For example, in Western Australia an Indigenous person is 27 times more likely to be imprisoned than a non-Indigenous person. This is another critical statistic to be addressed if we are to Close the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage’.

The inquiry will focus on prevention and early intervention in order to identify strategies to assist in reducing the number of Indigenous Australians involved in the criminal justice system by considering:

- how the development of social norms and behaviours for Indigenous juveniles and young adults can lead to better social engagement;
- how alcohol and substance abuse contribute to Indigenous youth incarceration rates and the potential for health and justice authorities to address this;
- initiatives to improve the effectiveness of the education system and grow employment opportunity to reduce young Indigenous people’s involvement with the criminal justice system; and
- best practice examples of programs that support diversion of Indigenous people from juvenile detention centres and crime, and provide support for those returning from such centres.

The inquiry will also identify cross-jurisdictional challenges to coordination of services for Indigenous youth in the justice system, such as whether preventative programs can be better aligned to advance the health and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous young people.

The Committee invites submissions to the inquiry by **22 December 2009**. For the full terms of reference and advice on making submissions see the Committee’s website at www.aph.gov.au/atsia or contact the committee secretariat on **(02) 6277 4559**.

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair Hon Bob Debus on (02) 62774490. **For background information**, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au