



Enquiries to: Grant Hawgood
Telephone: (07) 3405 5746
Facsimile: (07) 3237 1453
File Ref:

Senator Claire Moore
Chair
Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Moore

I am writing to provide information relevant to the Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Australia.

During oral evidence provided by me on 16 May 2008, in the context of comments relating to a secure unit in the women's prison in Brisbane, Senator Allison enquired about women in the safety unit at the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC):

'I think there are six women in individual cells, and they are there for 23 hours a day in total isolation and seclusion, and restraints when they are brought out, I understand...specifically, with regard to that very high secure unit, do you keep statistics on the period of time they are kept in such spaces or the frequency with which they go back to prison and then go back to those units? My understanding from talking to staff is that the number is quite high. They were not able to give me the figures, but the revolving door into these units is alive and well'.

During the hearing, I undertook to ascertain the information from Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) and provide it to the Committee. I am pleased to advise that I have consulted with QCS, who have provided the following information relating to Senator Allison's question.

The BWCC has accommodation for nine female prisoners in its safety unit. In accordance with section 53(1) of the *Corrective Services Act 2006*, a prisoner may be placed on a safety order to maintain their safety, the safety of others, or for the security or good order of the corrective services facility. A prisoner who has been placed on a safety order may be accommodated in the health centre, in a detention unit, in their cell, or in a safety unit.

QCS has advised that their department does not retain data regarding the average length a prisoner may be accommodated in a safety unit, nor do they retain data relating to the frequency with which prisoners move between prison and the safety unit. However, QCS has advised that the length of time an individual prisoner spends on a safety order in the safety unit is recorded, and must be reviewed in accordance with sections 55 and 56 of the *Corrective Services Act 2006*.

QCS has advised that case notes are written daily for all prisoners accommodated in the safety unit. The daily routine of prisoners in the safety unit consists of 'out-of-cell' time for meals, afternoon activities, and prisoner association time (where applicable). In addition, prisoners in the safety unit are permitted to have access to personal and legal visits, and telephone access.

The Committee also queried the restraint of safety unit prisoners upon their movement from the unit. QCS have advised that while there may be individual circumstances where a person is assessed as requiring restraints, for example, while being escorted to the health centre, it is not usual practice.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Committee in preparing its final report for the Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Australia.

Should you have any further queries, I would be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on (07) 3234 0607.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Groves", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Dr Aaron Groves
Senior Director, Mental Health Branch
04/09/2008