



**Queensland
Government**

22 FEB 2006

Department of
Corrective Services

Office of the
Director-General

Mr Ian Holland
Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Holland

I write in relation to correspondence directed to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health from Ms Anne Warner, President of Sisters Inside Inc, dated 30 November 2005.

As was clearly pointed out in previous correspondence, the Department of Corrective Services investigates all allegations made regarding its operation of correctional centres in Queensland. The majority of the allegations raised in previous correspondence by Sisters Inside have been fully investigated and found to be without substance. If a particular allegation has not been addressed in previous correspondence, this should in no way be interpreted or construed as the Department accepting the allegation or indicating that it has not been investigated.

I also direct the committee's attention to the fact that allegations are investigated by a range of external and internal areas as part of a tough and ongoing policy of scrutiny.

These investigations may be conducted by a range of external authorities including the Crime and Misconduct Commission, the Ombudsman, the Queensland Police Service as well as internal investigative areas including the Ethical Standards Branch, Official Visitors and the Chief Inspector of Prisons.

A significant investigatory arm is the Corrective Services Investigation Unit (CSIU), a specialised branch of the Queensland Police Service which is attached to the Department for the purposes of managing the investigation, and where appropriate, prosecution of criminal matters in corrective services facilities. The Detective Inspector in charge of the CSIU reports to both the Commissioner of Police and the Department's Director-General. Where there is evidence of criminal activity, prosecutions are launched. Recently, a corrective services officer in Townsville was found guilty of assaulting a female prisoner. He is also facing disciplinary action which may range from loss of pay, demotion or dismissal.

**Leaders in corrections:
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Our comments should not be construed or interpreted as "seeking to discredit " the testimony of Ms Debbie Kilroy or Ms Michelle Tanin as given to the committee in its hearing of 4 August 2005. We live in a democracy and welcome robust discussion regarding the operations and directions of our correctional system.

However, to clarify several issues:

1. Sisters Inside has not been excluded from delivering services in either Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre or the Numinbah Correctional Centre. The issue of the implementation of a set of protocols arose following a number of media reports by Ms Kilroy drawing comparisons between the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and the treatment of prisoners at the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre. The comments caused significant distress to the staff at the centre for obvious reasons and in fact, the Queensland Public Sector Union wanted Sisters Inside to be suspended. The implementation of the protocols allowed the organisation to continue to deliver services during this period of significant industrial unrest. The protocols that relate to service provider access and movement within correctional centres have been applied to all service providers delivering services within facilities. No complaints have been received from other service providers with respect to these protocols.

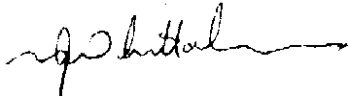
In terms of service delivery, I simply point out that in the period 28 June 2004 to 20 December 2004, 743 prisoners nominated to see Sisters Inside staff (some prisoners are listed to see Sisters Inside for multiple sessions and for multiple issues), this involved 578 individual prisoners and involved 168 centre visits by the staff of Sisters Inside. For the period 4 January 2005 to 19 December 2005, some 8 236 prisoner sessions were booked to see Sisters Inside (some prisoners are listed to see Sisters Inside for multiple sessions and for multiple issues involving 3 717 individual prisoners and 787 centre visits by Sisters Inside staff. As is apparent, the level of access and prisoners seen has been increasing, not decreasing.

2. I am not in a position to release the medical details or history of Ms Michelle Tanin. However, in terms of evidence claiming that there was an absence of medical and professional visits during the period she was in the Crisis Support Unit, I would simply say that during this period she was visited and assessed on a regular basis by a visiting medical officer, psychiatrist, a psychologist, and senior psychologist from the time of her entry to her release.
3. In terms of the recommendations submitted by Sisters Inside, I make the following points:
 - the decision to charge or not charge an offender with any offence – whether or not it is related to their medical condition – is one for other sections of the criminal justice system. It is not a decision that is made by the Department of Corrective Services;
 - issues of whether an individual should be sentenced to incarceration is one for the judicial system to decide. It is the responsibility of the Department of Corrective Services to administer the sentence imposed by the relevant court;

- the Crisis Support Unit is accessible to the range of monitoring bodies and individuals;
- women in the Crisis Support Unit can and do access the services of Sisters Inside; and
- women in the Crisis Support Unit are assessed on a regular basis – as is mandated in the legislation - by both medical doctors and psychologists.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Neil Whittaker

Deputy Director-General, Strategic and Corporate Services

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