



CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Centre for Advocacy Research & Education in Social Policy and Ethics

Ian Holland
Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Holland

I am writing on behalf of those groups and individuals whose work during 2004 resulted in the publication of '*INCORRECTIONS: Investigating prison release practice and policy in Queensland and its impact on community safety*'. They are: Catholic Prison Ministry, Centacare, Cathy Pereira (Solicitor), Lifeline Community Care, Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies at Queensland University of Technology, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation (QEA) for Legal Services, Sisters Inside, ACRO, Smarter Jails = Safer Society, BoysTown, Prisoners' Legal Service, Diane Fingleton-McGrath, and the UnitingCare Centre for Social Justice.

We congratulate the Senate on this initiative to consider how well the current mental health service systems meet the Commonwealth mental health plans. It is also pleasing that the Committee has invited contributions from the public.

The research report is attached to this letter thus forming our submission. The relevance is clear: many prisoners either enter prison having already experienced mental illness or subsequently experience very poor mental health while in the prison system. The report focuses on one aspect of prison policy and practice – **how the release of prisoners is managed and what impacts this management may have**. This is a critical focus because it is premised on the reality that 99.9% of prisoners will one day return to life on the outside, to become members of the community alongside the rest of us, as justice requires that they should. A corrections system that fails to provide proper preparation for release and adequate supervision of prisoners released into the community invariably fails as a correction system. Not only does faulty release practice and policy threaten the human rights of prisoners as well as victims of crime, it contributes to recidivism and undermines community safety. Very importantly for prisoners with mental illness, their preparation for living in community, and similarly their support in community, including access to both medical and community services, is paramount to their wellbeing.

The report does show the dreadful experience the Queensland prison system is and the consequent threats to community safety. However the report is a constructive document. It explores at length, best practice for the release of prisoners and makes significant and detailed recommendations for improvements to the Queensland corrections system. There are specific recommendations regarding mental health and there are frequent references to mental health and mental illness throughout this report for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Greg Mackay
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UnitingCare Queensland