

Vanessa Goodwin MLC

Shadow Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

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DPP reveals Labor has failed to act on suspended sentence concerns since 2007

- DPP reveals he urged government action on suspended sentence breaches in 2007
- Recent reports have highlighted the unacceptably low rate of breaches of suspended sentences being acted upon
- Labor's failure to act more evidence of its mismanagement and incompetence

The Director of Public Prosecutions has revealed gross government mismanagement and incompetence when it comes to dealing with suspended sentences, in his annual report tabled in Parliament today.

Various reports in recent years have raised concerns about the treatment of breaches of suspended sentences in Tasmania, including a recent Australian Institute of Criminology report that found 41% of offenders on a wholly suspended sentence breached their sentence by committing one or more offences punishable by imprisonment. Yet action was taken in just of 6% of cases.

In its report on Sentencing last year, the Law Reform Institute also said:

Only five per cent of breached suspended sentences result in proceedings. The Institute's view is that this is unacceptable.

And further

Failure to initiate breach proceedings is not an inherent flaw of the suspended sentence, such a failure merely fuels the public perception that such sentences are an ineffectual slap on the wrist and contributes to a lack of confidence in sentencing.

In his annual report, the DPP says he first raised concerns about the issue in 2007.

He said that he advised that the protocols for referring such breaches to his office was not working and wrote to police suggesting that an electronic capturing system ought to be investigated.

He continues:

I wrote again in May 2007, having received no reply, and attempted to follow it up in 2008, where I discovered that in September 2007, the then Commissioner had prepared a Cabinet Minute for the Attorney General's signature seeking to make judges and magistrates responsible for identifying breaches. I am presently uncertain where matters stand.

The Attorney General needs to explain what the government is doing to ensure that breaches of suspended sentences are acted upon and she needs to explain why there has apparently been no progress on this matter for some two and a half years.

This is just more evidence of Labor Government incompetence, and of this government being more focused on its own scandals than on running Tasmania properly.

For further information or comment please call Brad Nowland – 0439 614 893