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Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation  
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Hon Tania Rattray MLC  
Chair  
Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration B

By email: [csjs@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:csjs@parliament.tas.gov.au)

Dear Ms Rattray

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important Inquiry.

I would like to begin by stating how important our Corrections system is, and unfortunately, it is often only the negatives which are publicised or reported on. While we continue to work to improve the system, it is especially important to focus on the many positive aspects of our Corrections system and the numerous things being achieved.

I am proud of the significant improvements in my time as Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation, and which have resulted in a better Corrections system. I remain absolutely committed to continuing to address the challenges within our Tasmanian Prison Service (TPS) and I would also like to acknowledge the many achievements in Community Corrections, which often go unrecognised.

My strong focus for our Tasmanian Corrections system is the rehabilitation of offenders due to the obvious benefits this provides to them and to our community. It reduces our prison population and keeps our communities safer.

The complexity of the Corrections system means that positive change can be slow, but it does not mean that positive change is not happening.

There are some achievements in the Corrections space which I would like to highlight, for the benefit of the Committee.

### **Recruitment**

Staffing levels across the Corrections portfolio have greatly increased over the previous two years. It is these valuable staff members who deliver the services that rehabilitate and support offenders in Tasmania.

Correctional Officer recruitment processes have been occurring at an increased rate, even despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Boosting Correctional Officer numbers was a key focus of mine during 2022, with four recruit schools and two bridging courses held throughout the year – the most recruit schools ever conducted in a calendar year. This will continue to be a focus in 2023 as we continue to do all that we can to attract more Correctional Officers into the Tasmanian Prison Service (TPS) in a competitive market, as part of our ongoing recruitment to ensure the safety of staff, inmates and the community.

### **Significant investment in improved infrastructure**

Our Government has committed more than \$415 million for three major prison infrastructure projects, including the now fully operational Southern Remand Centre (SRC), a new Northern Correctional Facility, and a new 50-bed maximum security unit on the Risdon Prison site.

In addition to these new major facilities, funding has also been provided to construct a dedicated health facility; and to undertake upgrades to shared central facilities within the Risdon Prison Complex (RPC), including a new kitchen and upgrades to the gatehouse, prisoner processing, health and visitor centre.

Having modern, fit for purpose facilities will allow for stronger rehabilitation, and ensure a better environment for inmates and our hard working staff. Purpose-built facilities provide many opportunities in the Corrections space.

### **Increased focus on rehabilitation**

I have already increased the focus on rehabilitation within our Corrections system and this focus will continue to strengthen further.

Our Corrections' commitments during the most recent State election were all clearly focused on rehabilitation. I'm proud to be leading this shift in focus and looking forward to seeing the outcomes of our increased investment in this area.

We are investing almost \$2.5 million towards new and expanded rehabilitation programs and staff within correctional facilities over a three year period.

This includes:

- \$780,000 over three years to partner with the Australian Red Cross to deliver their highly successful Community Based Health First Aid (CBHFA) program;
- \$610,000 over three years to partner with Connect 42 to deliver the Just Time Prison Parenting Program;
- \$100,000 over three years to partner with Dress for Success Hobart to expand the Welcome Back(pack) initiative, and;
- \$500,000 per annum for two years to fund five new therapeutic staff to work across our correctional facilities with a focus on delivering rehabilitation programs and drug and alcohol interventions.

The 2022-2023 State Budget included an additional \$500,000 for new literacy programs that will support inmates to improve their functional literacy, and provide a strong foundation for increased opportunities for employment upon release. The TPS's existing partnership with Libraries Tasmania

delivers learning, information and literacy support to inmates, with Libraries Tasmania staff and a Literacy Co-ordinator based within the prison education and library areas. This year, Libraries Tasmania is also piloting the use of tablets for literacy work, as well as looking at ways to improve digital literacy opportunities for inmates.

With more needing to be done to reduce our recidivism rate, and therefore, our strong focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, I am always looking at these types of opportunities.

### **Expanded Sentencing Options**

I have implemented a broad range of alternative sentencing options, including expanding the Court Mandated Diversion (CMD) Program, introducing deferred sentencing, introducing Home Detention and Electronic Monitoring (HDEM), and introducing High Risk Offender Orders (HRO Orders).

The Court Mandated Diversion (CMD) program deals with offenders whose risk of re-offending is addressed by treating their substance abuse issues in the community as an alternative to imprisonment. Most offenders on the CMD program have long histories of criminal activity and abuse of multiple substances. They have generally been exposed to a variety of sentencing options already, which have previously been unsuccessful.

CMD has assisted numerous offenders, who would otherwise have been sent to prison, to address their substance use issues. I attend many CMD graduations and am continually impressed at the turnaround after an offender's participation in this often 'last resort' program.

Funding of \$1.348 million has previously been provided for the expansion of the CMD Program to cater for increased demand as a result of Drug Treatment Orders, now also being available for matters before the Supreme Court. As a result, I have increased the CMD participant cap from 80 participants to 120.

Home detention is an order that involves the detention of an offender in a specified residence, during specified times, for the duration of the sentence under supervision, and subject to conditions. I am confident this new, alternative sentencing option strikes the right balance between rehabilitation of offenders and community protection. It also obviously keeps offenders out of prison.

Community Corrections will continue to be resourced to provide expanded sentencing options, to reduce the pressures on our custodial facilities, and to ensure that offenders can address the issues that contributed to their offending behaviour while being safely managed in the community. This will support offenders to 'give back' to the community and assist them to develop key life-skills and pro-social behaviours.

### **Legislative Reform**

I have led strong legislative reform in the Corrections and Rehabilitation space. Our Government has successfully passed new legislation to protect vulnerable victims, including strengthening family violence laws around non-fatal strangulation, stealthing and persistent family violence, as well as other important measures to support victims and vulnerable Tasmanians.

We have abolished remissions (ie. early release effectively not sanctioned by the sentencing court), we've passed dangerous criminals and high risk offenders legislation, passed legislation to allow the Parole Board to electronically monitor parolees, and passed legislation to better protect youth in custodial settings.

### **Concluding remarks**

I am confident that the multi-faceted strategy of combining increased rehabilitation opportunities for offenders, with strong investment in our infrastructure and recruitment and training of additional Correctional staff, will optimise the service delivery of our Corrections system, and deliver better rehabilitative outcomes that benefit all Tasmanians.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important Inquiry, I look forward to the Committee's Final Report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Elise Archer', with a large checkmark to the right.

Hon Elise Archer MP

**Attorney-General**

**Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation**