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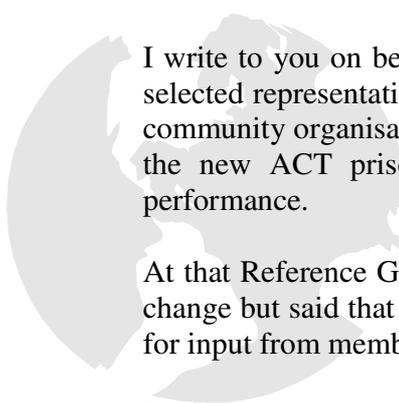
Community Coalition on Corrections  
C/- ACT Council of Social Services  
PO Box 849  
Mawson ACT 2607

# Community Coalition on Corrections

29 January 2009

**Mr John Hargreaves MLA,  
Minister for Corrections  
PO Box 1020  
Canberra City ACT 2601**

Dear John,



I write to you on behalf of the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections, of which I am the selected representative on the AMC Community Reference Group. The Coalition is a group of community organisations and individuals that have an interest in corrections and particularly in the new ACT prison (the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC)), its operation and its performance.

At that Reference Group's meeting on 14 January you indicated that you wanted the Group to change but said that you did not have a clear view of exactly what you wanted. You also asked for input from members present.

I reported your views to the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections at its meeting the next day and it asked me to write to you with its views to help guide you in your thinking on the issue.

- The ACT Community Coalition on Corrections is generally in agreement in the need to have a smaller sized Reference Group and 13 community representatives sounds about right. However, the selection of members of the Reference Group for reasons set out in the Coalition's letter dated 6 May to the then minister, Simon Corbell, needs to be representative and must include consumer representatives – particularly both male and female prisoner representatives and aboriginal representatives. It also needs to have a gender balance.
- It is clear, as you have stated, that the Group should be advisory and should not have executive powers nor become a Board of Management of the AMC. It should be about information sharing and advice. As Phil Lawler said, day-to-day operational service provision matters would not normally be matters dealt with through the Group.
- The ACT Community Coalition on Corrections is of the view that the Reference Group should remain as a community oriented one – that is to say oriented to both the prison community by way of a sounding board for procedures and protocols, and to the wider

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community in such a way that your expressed wish of restorative justice can be realised. You, of course, stressed the importance of this in the Forgotten Victims inquiry that you chaired. You will recall that the report of that inquiry recommended that establishment of “a community advisory group to provide input into the prison, which includes a sub-group specifically tasked to provide input on the needs of families of those in custody”. It also would be helpful to have a robust ministerial statement about the Advisory Group and community involvement.

- If it is your sincere intention that the Reference Group through its membership or otherwise, facilitate in whatever way it can, your vision that prisoners be restored to the community and that their families and the community generally are also restored, then there will clearly be matters that fall outside the purview of the superintendent of the prison. For this reason and for the reason that you, as Minister, need to have a channel to receive unvarnished feedback from as wide as possible representation of the community to which you are also responsible, the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections believes that the Reference Group should be chaired by a community representative and report to the Minister
- Membership of the Reference Group will come from diverse but relevant organisations and it is likely that there may be divergent views on some issues. Therefore a process and a protocol for handling those views in a courteous and respectful way would need to be established. That protocol would need to cover issues such as feedback to the community, feedback to a member’s own organisation, authorizations to speak on behalf of the Reference Group, privacy and confidentiality matters. And although it may seem obvious, subject to matters of privacy and confidentiality, membership of the Reference Group should not prevent a member speaking out on behalf of the organization he/she represents. No doubt, as you implied at the meeting, you would like the opportunity, in the first instance, to deal with negative issues should any arise. The chairmanship and reporting protocol outlined above would naturally provide such opportunity.

I look forward to your feedback on the views I have expressed above on behalf of the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections that are in response to your request for input on possible changes to the Reference Group.

Yours sincerely

Brian McConnell  
on behalf of the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections