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# Community Coalition on Corrections

6 February 2009

Mr Jon Stanhope  
Chief Minister  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA, ACT 2601

Dear Mr Stanhope,

The Community Coalition on Corrections seeks your Government's commitment to a whole of government planning and monitoring process to ensure effective aftercare for prisoners released from the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).

The Coalition is increasingly concerned that the human rights and rehabilitation objectives of the AMC will be undermined by poor planning and coordination of post-release services and support.

The Coalition commends your consistent commitment to the principle of "throughcare" articulated in your August 2004 Ministerial Statement to the Legislative Assembly. You stated that effective throughcare arrangements "will ensure the smooth reintegration of prisoners back into the ACT community on release" (p.5), and was based on "continuity of care, program and other service delivery." (p.11) What is at issue is, thus, not the objective but adequacy of measures taken to achieve what we all want.

In its letter to you dated 22 December 2007 the Coalition stressed the need for there to be clear pathways to a co-ordinated range of post release services for a detainee population characterised by social disadvantage and mental health and substance abuse problems. The Coalition pointed out then that:

- Post release services must include those for housing, mental health, family relationships support, benefits, employment, drug and alcohol dependence and, where sought, spiritual support. The list should also include services to help the high percentage of detainees who are survivors of sexual abuse.
- Post release services need to be co-ordinated.
- They need to involve case management. Parole alone, with its corrections focus, is inadequate and inappropriate for people who have served their time.

It remains the view of the Coalition that planning falls short.

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- Planning appears to be ad hoc involving calls for offers of assistance from Corrections to the NGO sector.
- It appears to be focussed on the immediate transition from custody into the community. Understandably Corrections appears to consider its responsibility ends once prisoners are unconditionally released.
- As things stand prisoners will be launched into an environment of meager band aid services which poorly funded NGOs are struggling to provide.

The continuing concerns about planning failings in these respects were, if anything, heightened as a result of the Community Inclusion Board's forum on 22 April last, Corrections' seminar on "throughcare" on 14 July and subsequent meetings with Corrections in which Coalition members participated.

In saying this, I need to acknowledge the good work that Corrections has been doing with specific community agencies in considering post-release accommodation options for some classes of offenders leaving the prison, eg for prisoners 'graduating' from the therapeutic community being developed jointly with ADFACT. However, what is needed now is a much more systematic approach, that brings in agencies beyond Corrections, who would be integral to the establishment of "post release community support networks".

What still needs to be done is the development of an after-care plan providing for clear pathways to a co-ordinated range of services for released prisoners. This will need to be drawn up by an authority other than Corrections though co-ordinated with Correction's "throughcare" programme. In the words of key recommendation seven of the Coalition's report, *Healthy or Harmful?: Mental Health and the Operational Regime of the New ACT Prison* mentioned in my letter dated 23 December 2008, what is required is whole of government planning to set in place a seamless set of measures within the prison and out into the community, including adequately resourced community services.

Accordingly, the Coalition proposes that you establish a cross-agency coordination body whose primary role would be to ensure that "throughcare" and "aftercare" services are well-planned, effectively and efficiently delivered, and subject to rigorous performance monitoring. Membership would be at senior levels from all relevant government and non-government agencies. Apart from the obvious advantages in effective coordination, such a body would send a clear message that offender outcomes were a whole of government and whole of community responsibility, to be achieved through strong partnerships around shared outcomes.

Specific issues such a body could cover include:

- considering gaps in service provision, with recommendations on priorities
- continuing case management as needed, to ensure that aftercare is effectively linked to throughcare
- provision of timely, accessible and appropriate mental health and addiction support services

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- enhancement of the capacity of family support networks of prisoners to provide support
- ensuring that specific offender groups, such as female and Indigenous have their ongoing needs met
- engaging the active participation of agencies outside the ACT's jurisdiction such as Centrelink providing services vital to the achievement of desired outcomes
- determining lead agency responsibilities for key outcomes
- establishing performance information, including the critical question of the monitoring period to measure various results like recidivism, health, employment/training and housing

Given the size and geographically contained nature of Canberra, we have a unique opportunity to get this right, and become a national and international model of excellent practice. To achieve this, we need not only a model prison, but also a model well-integrated system of throughcare and aftercare, to ensure that the substantial investment in the prison achieves the desired outcomes.

We would be happy to discuss these issues at your convenience.

Because the matters raised in this letter have particular relevance to the Minister for Corrections and the Minister for Health, I am copying this letter to them.

Yours sincerely,

(John Ley)

Chair

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