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MEDIA RELEASE

Adequacy of Youth Diversionary Programs Report Released

The Law and Safety Committee's report into the adequacy of youth diversionary programs has been tabled today in State Parliament said Committee Chair Mr Geoff Provest MP.

"The inquiry gave us the opportunity to consider how best we can help young offenders get back on track" said Mr Provest. The report makes 60 recommendations and 17 findings spanning a variety of areas, including mental health; drug and alcohol rehabilitation; education and housing.

Of particular concern for the Committee was the over representation of Aboriginal young people in the Juvenile Justice system. "Aboriginal over representation must be addressed and the Committee made a number of recommendations aimed at achieving this" said Mr Provest.

Chief amongst these was a recommendation to expand the Youth Koori Court, which the Committee had the opportunity to visit during its inquiry. "We visited the Youth Koori Court at Parramatta and we were very impressed with what we saw" Mr Provest stated. "This is a culturally appropriate initiative to address the underlying causes of offending, and the Committee has recommended its expansion, particularly to regional areas".

The Committee also examined the diversionary options available under the *Young Offenders Act 1997*, and recommended changes be considered to make it easier for Police and the Courts to divert young people using warnings, cautions and youth justice conferences. In addition, the Committee recommended the NSW Government examine the age of criminal responsibility in NSW, following stakeholder concerns that the current age of 10 years may be too low.

During its inquiry the Committee also heard concerns from some stakeholders that the NSW Police Force's Suspect Target Management Plan (STMP) may be undermining efforts to divert young people from the criminal justice system, and that STMPs should not be applied to anyone under 18 years. "It is clear that the STMP is an important community safety tool that should be retained" said Mr Provest. "However, the Committee has listened to concerns and made recommendations to ensure that STMPs are policed appropriately, and to improve transparency and accountability around this important program".

As part of its inquiry the Committee also visited three Juvenile Justice detention centres in Wagga Wagga, Dubbo and Airds, to see issues first-hand, and to speak directly with detainees about what they think works, and what could be improved. "The Committee considered it vital that young people's voices be heard as part of the inquiry and case studies for some of these young people form an important part of the report" said Mr Provest.

The Committee received 38 written submissions from a range of stakeholders during its inquiry including the NSW Government, the Children's Court of NSW, peak bodies and legal experts. It also heard from 23 witnesses across three public hearings in April and May 2018.

For media comment, please contact Geoff Provest on (07) 5523 4816. Further information about the report can be obtained by visiting the Committee's webpage at <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lawandsafety> or by contacting the Committee Manager, Elspeth Dyer, on (02) 9230 2214.