

**Submission
No 18**

**SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN OF IMPRISONED PARENTS IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

Name: John Murray

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The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox MLC
Chair
Committee on Children and Young People.
Parliament House
Macquarie Street

Dear Sir.

Re: Inquiry into Support for Children of Imprisoned Parents in NSW

In relation to the terms of reference I believe that the Committee has a responsibility to inquire into the conditions and situation of children in the care of the State, both as children of prisoners, and as prisoners.

It should be expected that within both the juvenile and adult prison systems there will be prisoners who are presently under the care of the State who have had children removed from them due to imprisonment, or had children removed from them prior to becoming prisoners.

With what has been learnt in the last two decades about the abusive and dysfunctional nature of the care system the Committee should understand the concerns society should have about both the children of imprisoned parents in care, and the plight of graduates from the care system incarcerated in prisons.

I expect that the relevant authorities will not be able to inform the Committee of the numbers of prisoners from this background; will not be able to inform the Committee of how many have children; nor how many have had their children removed from them and in their turn placed into State care.

In this regard the Committee should reflect upon the 1997 Symonds Committee Inquiry bolding at page 57 of the sentence **“There are no available official data regarding how many children are state wards because their primary carer is in prison”**.

There was a number of inquiries following the original Children of Imprisoned Parents Inquiry chaired by the Hon. Anne Symonds that made recommendations to various government departments that would have allowed this Committee easy access to data and information that would allow the Committee to better understand the nature of the problem it is inquiring into for people who are ‘care experienced’.

Numerous Legislative Council Inquiries have made recommendations directly to the Department of Corrective Services (and others) that it should undertake research so as to understand the overrepresentation of children in care and care leavers in the adult prison population.

For example, the Committee into the Increase in the Prisoner Populations (2001) first recommendation reads:

“The Committee recommends the Department of Corrective Services undertake a research project to focus on the needs of former State wards and care leavers in the prison system. The research project should identify the numbers of former State wards and care leavers in the prison system.”

The NSW corrections department has ignored these recommendations and thus has not generated any policies or programs that are specifically directed at meeting the needs of care leavers in prison at any level, or the specific and unique problems for their children.

In this regard the Committee should examine the implications behind the Symonds Committee report recommendation 12 that “...as a matter of urgency and without delay....That the Minister for Community Services introduce a training course to overcome negative stereotypes of parents who are prisoners for all District Officers who work with children [of imprisoned parents]...”.

The Committee should consider if this recommendation should equally have been applied to Corrective Services then, and whether it is applicable today.

The intransigence of the Department of Corrective Services to comply with a simple recommendation, stated on numerous occasions by the Parliamentary Committees and expressed as desirable by many Members of Parliaments during question time and in debates, that it should inform itself about the high number of care leavers in its custody and control can only be explained by a culture that is not just dismissive of children in care, but dismissive of the Parliament itself.

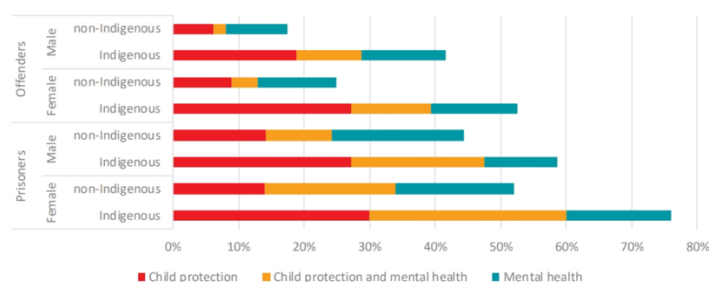
I put it to the Committee that the Department of Corrective Services has failed to undertake its duties to society and should not have required reminding by Parliament through Committee recommendations or by other means of its responsibility to do its job.

I ask the Committee to urgently seek that a taskforce be initiated by the Department of Justice or other body as the Committee sees fit, so as to link Corrections information systems with other relevant agencies so the Committee may be properly informed about the nature of the problem it is inquiring into.

I urge the Committee not to accept Corrections and ‘The Welfares’ continued ignorance of this issue and allow that ignorance to adversely impact upon the Committees and societies ability to understand and deal with this issue.

I would be happy to assist the Committee Secretariat to familiarise itself with work that is being carried out in other Australian States and internationally to better understand this problem. In the meantime, the Committee can review this simple chart from the recent Queensland Productivity Commissions report into recidivism.

Figure 6.2 Overlap between courts, child protection and mental health for offenders and prisoners



Source: Stewart 2019.

As the Committee can see, women prisoners who have been in care in that State are incredibly overrepresented in that States prisoner population making up 33% of non-indigenous female prisoners and an astounding 60% of indigenous women prisoners.

I expect the situation in NSW to be very similar and hope the Committee would ask various government and non-government agencies how it is they have not recognised this, and if they have recognised this why they have neglected to do anything about it.

As a citizen who entered State care because of parental incarceration I hope this issue will receive your Committee's attention. As someone who also gave evidence to the previous 1997 inquiry into children of prisoners, and a recipient of a 2004 HEROC award for my work on this issue, I wish you every success with this important inquiry.

I would be happy to assist the inquiry in any way you, or your Committee may see fit and would appreciate the opportunity to give further evidence on these matters.

Yours sincerely

John Murray