



*Coalition for Appropriate  
Supported Accommodation  
for People with Disabilities*

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22<sup>nd</sup> October 2004

The Director  
Standing Committee on Law and Justice  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Director

SUBJECT: INQUIRY INTO BACK-END HOME DETENTION

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed introduction of back-end home detention.

My comments relate to the unsuitability of back-end detention for people suffering from mental illness.

My experience with my own Gethsemane Community, St Vincent de Paul Society and Coalition for Appropriate Supported Accommodation for People with Disabilities (CASA), is that many people with mental health problems end up homeless or in threat of becoming homeless. Obviously, back-end home detention relies on the offender having a relatively stable home environment to go to, and that is mostly not the case for those with mental health problems. Research shows that 70 per cent of people in St Vincent de Paul Society homeless persons' shelters have a mental health problem and CASA is continually dealing with substandard accommodation issues in licensed boarding houses – which unfortunately are often the 'end of the road' for accommodation for people with a mental illness.

The fact that the Home Detention Act 1996 (NSW) requires that the suitability of the offenders proposed residence be considered when home detention is being considered should generally rule out those with a mental illness. An offender, without a permanent place of residence or with a residence inappropriately equipped for proper monitoring must be assessed as unsuitable for home detention.

Apart from the accommodation issue, it is impossible to imagine that there would be adequate resources for the appropriate support services to provide living skills assessments, monitoring and training. Anyone with a mental illness who was considered suitable for home detention would also need ongoing monitoring and administration of medication. Who would do this? With current community mental health services grossly under staffed and under resourced, they would not be available. Our experience is that people with a mental illness would just be dumped somewhere and then left to fend for themselves. To consider them suitable for home detention would not just be an injustice; it would be yet another area of gross neglect by authorities of one of the most disadvantaged groups in our community.

I would welcome a meeting with the committee with representatives of St Vincent de Paul Society and CASA to discuss the matter in depth.

Yours sincerely

*Myree Harris* per *MHA*

Sr Myree Harris RSJ  
President  
Advisory Committee for the Care of People with Mental Illness

*Harry Herbert*

Rev Harry Herbert  
Coalition for Appropriate Supported Accommodation For People with Disabilities