



SACOSS

South Australian Council
of Social Service

You can! help create a better State

SACOSS Fact Sheet No. 4: Law & Justice

In the lead-up to the 2010 South Australian state election, political parties, independent candidates and interest groups are all constructing their policy platforms in an attempt to entice you: the voter. SACOSS asks that you use your position of power to Help Create a Better State – find out the facts, read beyond the headlines, and make *people* the foundation of policy in South Australia.

South Australia has long been cultivating a “tough on crime” mentality, supporting increasingly harsher punishments in an attempt to deter and punish criminals. However, the criminal justice system in this state has failed to acknowledge and address the strong links between social and environmental factors and criminal behaviour, including the well defined issues of the cycle of crime and the effects of disadvantage. Our “tough on crime” approach doesn’t work: it’s time to end the cycle.

The Current State...

1. Cost across Australia — In 2005 crime cost Australia \$36 billion – 4.1% of our gross domestic product (GDP).

2. Price of prisons in SA — It costs the South Australian taxpayer \$185 per day to accommodate each prisoner in our prison system. This works out to \$67, 525 per prisoner, every year.

3. Disadvantage and crime — Individuals facing negative social, economic and familial conditions are 56% more likely to commit a crime than individuals not facing poverty or disadvantage.

4. Neglect and crime — 57% of juvenile crime is committed by children or young people who have experienced neglect. Studies have shown that between 30 to 60% of juvenile offenders brought before the Children’s Court later come into contact with the adult criminal justice system

5. Overcrowding — Prison overcrowding is a serious issue in South Australia. Research has found strong causal links between prison overcrowding and increased incidences of violence, as well as increased incidences of psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder. This situation is expected to worsen with the ‘Super Prison’ complex being scrapped in the 2009/10 State Budget.

...a Better State

1. Breaking the cycle — *Children and young people who are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system must be identified and assisted with early intervention strategies.* This includes the implementation of diversionary and restorative processes to limit exposure to the criminal justice system as much as is practicable.

2. Don’t incarcerate, rehabilitate — *A greater emphasis must be placed on rehabilitation and treatment programs in the criminal justice system.* Punitive sanctions historically have not deterred the commission of crime. Rehabilitation and treatment programs,

however, are cheaper and more effective than prisons.

3. Understand prisoner demographics — *Significant efforts must be made to identify the common characteristics of prisoners /offenders, including mental health issues, the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in offending and prison statistics, CALD communities and juvenile justice issues.*

4. Focus on restorative justice — *South Australia must move away from being “tough on crime” and focus instead on becoming tough on the causes of crime, by engaging both victims and offenders, with an emphasis on ‘restoring’ the offender, the victim and the community. This means we must develop appropriate and fully resourced alternatives that offer victims a greater opportunity to participate within the justice system and respond better to individual needs.*

5. Build community capacity — *We must ensure communities have the capacity to address the underlying causes of social exclusion, and enable people to fully participate in and contribute to their community. Community capacity-building also contributes to crime prevention, through education, training and programs such as crime prevention through environmental design.*

(You can) Help create a better State

- Get up to speed – read the SACOSS Law and Justice Principles Paper.
- Ask your local MP about law and justice issues, and tell them what you think.
- Ask your local candidates what their election policies will include, and tell them what you think.
- Read about the positions of a range of interest groups, and contact them for further information.

REMEMBER that political parties and candidates respond to public opinion – it is our strongest weapon to ensure progressive and equitable policies!

Other Groups to Contact

Victim Support Services
www.victimsa.org
(08) 8231 5626

Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement
www.alrm.org.au
(08) 8113 3777

Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Service SA (OARS)
www.oars.org.au
(08) 8210 0811

Office of Crime Statistics and Research
www.ocsar.sa.gov.au
(08) 8207 1731

Commissioner for Victims' Rights
www.voc.sa.gov.au
(08) 8207 1723

Aboriginal Prisoner and Offenders Support Service
(08) 8223 3177