



youth affairs network qld

MEDIA RELEASE

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Genuine change needed in the youth justice system

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland's (YANQ) Director Siyavash Doostkhah, has cautiously welcomed the announcement by the State Government that a submission will go to Cabinet as early as Monday, setting out a timetable for the removal of young people from adult prisons during this term of government.

"The devil is going to be in the detail and we are waiting to see if Labor is going to deal with the youth justice system in crisis or if they are reacting to community pressure in an ad hoc manner" Mr Doostkhah said.

The Government may be looking at segregating 17- year -old boys in sections of adult prisons like they have done in Brisbane. Mr Doostkhah said, "Clearly this will not be good enough and community will not be fooled by this. These children need to have access to education and other support and to be in care of youth justice workers not correctional facility officers".

We also have not heard anything about what is going to happen to the young girls who are also suffering in adult prisons. We have to make sure that no child is kept anywhere near an adult prison, full stop.

The best process Government could adopt is to immediately change the law so 17 year olds are treated as children and included in the youth justice system. It is of paramount importance that the Government simultaneously changes the age of criminal responsibility and by doing so, releases all young people 13 and under into care of the community. The youth detention centres are also choc-a-block with children on remand, over 85% of children kept in detention are on remand and the majority never get a custodial sentence, meaning the only time they have been kept in a detention centre is when they are on remand. Dealing with the remand issue will free up a more than necessary number of beds required for the transfer of 17 year olds from adult prisons to youth detention. "We are going to see if the Government is genuine about fixing the youth justice system or if they are trying to hide the problems and operate in a business as usual way, which will continue to put children at risk of harm" said Mr Doostkhah.

YANQ wants to see the Queensland Government shift the responsibility for the management of youth justice from the Attorney General's portfolio back to the Community and Youth portfolio. "Many of the children in the youth justice system also have a history involving the child protection system and it would be much better for these children to have their protection and rehabilitation integrated, and their rights upheld by the Minister responsible for children and youth".

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