

## Media Release

Date: Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015

### Smarter justice needed in the former 'Smart State'

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS) is calling on the Palaszczuk Government to show leadership and champion change by adopting a justice reinvestment approach to address the state's incarceration crisis. The call comes in the wake of Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) figures that reveal more people in Queensland are living behind bars than ever before.

Shane Duffy, Chief Executive Officer of ATSILS, said "we would welcome an opportunity to engage with the government to discuss long term solutions to the crisis based on intervention, prevention and diversion strategies which form the basis of a Justice Reinvestment approach."

The QCS figures show a 20% surge in the state's prison numbers in just two years, and confirms the state's prison population is the highest on record at more than 7200. All 12 of the state's high security facilities are currently operating at beyond capacity and serious overcrowding has seen a doubling in the rate of reported assaults.

A considerable factor in the crisis is the gross over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland prisons. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently make up less than 4% of the state's population, however account for nearly a third of the state's inmates. Various governments tough on crime policies have disproportionately affected the most disadvantaged in the community and have put a strain on our prison system at great public expense.

With such high Indigenous representation in the crisis, ATSILS urges the government to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, services and their representatives, to develop and implement justice reinvestment solutions.

Mr Duffy said "coming from a deficit position the government can no longer invest in costly, unsustainable prison infrastructure at the expense of affordable housing, education, mental health and social services that are vital to the fabric of thriving safe communities."

Justice reinvestment is an approach that has had success in the USA and fundamental to the approach is investment in community services that tackle the underlying root causes of crime. Justice reinvestment makes a very strong economic argument to better utilise tax payer funds. Currently there is a pilot scheme happening in Bourke, NSW and ATSILS hope to see the Justice Reinvestment approach adopted in communities across Queensland.

The current crisis presents a great opportunity for the new government to charter a course of innovative change and localise justice reinvestment approaches specific to the challenges we face in Queensland.

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