



MEDIA RELEASE

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Deferral of statutory minimum sentences for young people a positive step

VCOSS and Youthlaw have welcomed the Victorian Government's decision to defer the introduction of statutory minimum sentences for young people aged 16 and 17 to allow for further consultation

The decision, outlined in its response today to the Sentencing Advisory Council report on statutory minimum sentences, reflects concerns from community and legal advocates about introducing mandatory sentences for young offenders

'It is critical that judges continue to use their expertise and discretion to tailor sentences to the individual circumstances of young offenders and the circumstances of the offence and ensure that the focus is on rehabilitation rather than detention,' said Tiffany Overall, Co-Director of Youthlaw.

'We welcomed the further expansion of diversion programs in the 2011-12 Victorian State Budget but it is critical that the Victorian Government further enhance such diversionary programs which seek to address the underlying causes of offending behaviour.'

'The community sector welcomes the opportunity to participate in any consultative processes on this issue. Further consideration must give weight to a rehabilitative focus in dealing with young people,' said Cath Smith, CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service.

'This takes into account their developing maturity and recognises that imprisonment fails to address re-offending and can harm a young person's prospects of rehabilitation.' 'This step reinforces the positive work that is underway as part of the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, given that about a third of those young people in the youth justice system have a history of involvement in the child protection system,' said Ms Smith.

Youthlaw and VCOSS welcome the SAC recommendation to allow 18 - 20 year olds to participate in the dual track system, and urge the Government to adopt this recommendation.

The Victorian justice system has a proud tradition of emphasising rehabilitation and diversion. We look forward to working with the Victorian Government to continue to build on these foundations to enhance community safety.

**For more information, or to arrange an interview with
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