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SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S SENTENCING REFORMS ARE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION: INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

“South Australia’s sentencing changes are a step in the right direction. By placing non-violent and white collar offenders in home detention, we can relieve government budgets of the high cost of incarceration”, said Chris Berg, Senior Fellow with the free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

The South Australian parliament has passed the Statutes Amendment (Home Detention) Bill 2015, enabling judges to permit low-risk, non-violent offenders to serve their sentences in home detention and some suitable prisoners to be released into home detention earlier in their sentences. The law aims to improve rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.

“This legislation accords with the preliminary findings of a new IPA research project into criminal justice,” said Mr Berg.

“An increasing number of people are being locked up when justice and the community would be better served by alternative punishments.”

Incarceration rates across Australia have risen sharply in the last 10 years. Some of the main drivers of this phenomenon are the expanding reach of the criminal law, an over-reliance on prison to punish crime, and an across the board lengthening of custodial sentences.

“Many of the people being caught in the ever-widening net of the criminal law are non-violent offenders, such as those involved in white-collar crime, and who pose little threat to the community,” said Mr Berg. “And there is emerging evidence that long prisons sentences are not as effective in deterring crime as previously thought.” said Mr Berg.

“Re-examining our priorities in criminal justice is not about being ‘soft on crime’. Every dollar spent on jailing people unnecessarily is a dollar that might have been spent on more police and on targeting the worst criminals.”

“The criminal justice system is yet another part of Australian government in which we are spending more and more every year for worse and worse results. It is time to do better,” said Mr Berg.

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