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IPA: REFORMS TO FINE RECOVERY LAWS ARE A GOOD IDEA

“The Australian Labor Party’s proposal to enforce court-ordered fines through the tax and transfer system is a good idea that deserves widespread support,” said Andrew Bushnell, Research Fellow with the free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

The policy announced today would enable relevant government agencies to use the tax and social security systems to recover unpaid fines.

“Although today’s policy announcement is short on detail, we support the idea in principle. For example, it should be possible for the Government to enforce fines through reduced benefits for offenders. This is surely preferable to sending nonviolent offenders to prison.”

Australia’s incarceration rate has risen by almost 40 percent in the past decade, with prison expenditure now exceeding \$3.5 billion each year. Forthcoming IPA research indicates that reform efforts should be directed towards reducing the number of nonviolent offenders being incarcerated.

“The IPA continues to argue in favour of alternatives to prison for nonviolent, low-risk offenders. It is important to punish offenders but justice can often be delivered without taxpayers and communities incurring the massive cost of prison,” said Mr Bushnell. “By strengthening alternative punishments, we can return prisons to their primary purpose, which is protecting the community from dangerous criminals.”

“This reform will benefit disadvantaged individuals who might otherwise go to prison because they can’t pay a fine. It will also enable courts to more readily impose fines on a wide range of nonviolent offenders, including white-collar offenders, in place of prison,” said Mr Bushnell.

“Taking criminal justice reform seriously means applying these principles consistently, and looking at all options to reduce needless incarceration.”

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