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IPA: CURTIS PRISON SENTENCE NEEDLESS AND WASTEFUL

“Today’s sentencing of Oliver Curtis to prison is a good example of Australia’s over-incarceration problem, with millions of dollars squandered every year imprisoning people who are no threat to the community,” said Andrew Bushnell, Research Fellow with the free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs.

Sydney investment banker Oliver Curtis was sentenced today in the New South Wales Supreme Court to serve between 1 and 2 years in prison. He had earlier been convicted of insider trading offences dating from 2008-9.

Curtis will now join the growing ranks filling Australian prisons. There are more than 36,000 people in prison in Australia, an increase of 40 percent from a decade ago. About 47 percent of prisoners were convicted of nonviolent crimes. The total cost of prisons in Australia is around \$3.8 billion per year, or around \$110,000 per prisoner per year.

“We need to remember that the primary purpose of prison is to isolate dangerous criminals to protect the community,” said Mr Bushnell. “Sending nonviolent offenders like Curtis to prison is a waste of resources that could be better used elsewhere.”

Forthcoming IPA research argues that the best way to reduce Australia’s ballooning incarceration rate is to focus on applying alternative punishments to nonviolent offenders like Curtis.

“The IPA supports alternative punishments like home detention and fines for nonviolent low-risk offenders from whatever background,” said Mr Bushnell.

“The punishment must fit the crime. This means that it is wrong to over-punish someone merely to send a message to others. We must defend proportional punishment in all cases, not just in those with sympathetic defendants.”

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