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IPA: NSW HOLDING CELL CHAOS A SYMPTOM OF WIDER PROBLEM

“Revelations today that Oliver Curtis is still being detained in a holding cell longer than the maximum 48 hours highlight Australia’s over-incarceration problem, with millions of dollars squandered every year imprisoning people who are no threat to the community,” said Andrew Bushell, Research Fellow with the free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs.

Steve McMahon, Chairman of the Prison Officer’s branch of the Public Service Association, recently said that overcrowding was a problem and that every bed in the NSW prison system was currently occupied.

“With such damning evidence of the inability of our prison system to manage more prisoners, sending nonviolent offenders like Curtis to prison is a waste of resources that could be better used elsewhere. We need to remember that the primary purpose of prison is to isolate dangerous criminals to protect the community,” said Mr Bushnell.

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.

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. For example, the Australian Labor Party’s proposal to enforce court-ordered fines through the tax and transfer system is a good idea to reduce incarceration and worthy of support.” 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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