



# Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd.

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## **Suspending Sentences is part of Pre election Punitive Sentencing Bidding War.**

The recent Sentencing Advisory Council report recommending the abolition of suspended sentences confirms the role of the Council as a rubber stamp for more punitive sentencing proposals. Many people hoped that the Sentencing Council might shine some light on the ineffectiveness of locking more and more people up every year. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Council was barely announced when punitive sentencing groups attacked it as not adequately representing victims. The Attorney General Rob Hulls immediately added a person to the Council in an attempt at meeting the criticism. The critics of the Council need not have worried. The Council's approach to suspended sentences has been to privilege punitive populism over any of the logical arguments that have been put to it for retaining suspended sentencing. It is very disappointing that the Council is uncritically contributing to more punitive sentencing rather than encouraging greater scrutiny of this trend.

The Attorney General's rush to implement the changes suggests the pre election "I'm tougher on crime than you are" bidding war has started.

What we need is a commitment by the State Liberal and Labour party that after the election whoever wins will call a moratorium on punitive sentencing proposals. The Government of the day should then undertake to properly evaluate all their policy commitments to lock up more people more often for longer via a thorough Parliamentary Inquiry which would consider the costs and benefits of imprisonment versus other alternatives.

The money spent on the Sentencing Advisory Council should be better spent providing the community with some facts about the social and economic costs of more punitive sentencing.

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