

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2018–19

Melbourne — 17 May 2018

Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Fiona Patten

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Tim Smith

Ms Vicki Ward

Witnesses

Ms Gayle Tierney, Minister for Corrections,

Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary, and

Acting Commissioner Rod Wise, Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice and Regulation.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2018–19 budget estimates.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Corrections, the Honourable Gayle Tierney, MLC; Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation; and Mr Rod Wise, Acting Commissioner, Corrections Victoria.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege.

The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, any PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Witness advisers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions.

Visual presentation.

Ms TIERNEY — Thank you, Chair. Thank you, committee members. The 2018–19 budget provides a total investment of over \$787 million in the Corrections portfolio. This includes asset funding for the new prison at Lara, further expansion and security upgrades and additional investment in specific rehabilitation programs as well as contributing to the government's counterterrorism reforms.

During the term of this government we have undertaken some major reforms to modernise our corrections system and improve community safety. The Harper review represents the biggest reform to the post-sentence scheme since it was established. We have funded and acquitted all recommendations. Over the past three and a half years we have opened over 1900 beds across the prison system, and we have also funded over 1200 new beds to open in coming years. Since 2015 we have invested in programs and extra staff to ensure prisoners have the best chance of turning their life around, and we have reformed and expanded the Community Correctional Services, which was underfunded and under-resourced by the former government. In relation to family violence, corrections has a unique role to play in tackling that issue, as recognised by the royal commission. As you can see from this slide, we have a significant legislative agenda that we have embarked upon during this term of government.

As you can see from this slide, the system is responding to our reforms. This table shows the progress we have made. The first two indicators show that we have better staff ratios in both custodial and community settings, improvements in prisoner recidivism rate, improvements in prison safety, we are operating at a safe and effective prison utilisation rate — currently below 90 per cent, and we have a reduction in the escape rate. In short, Chair, we are managing better the growth in the system.

Managing demand means having sufficient permanent prison capacity and not relying on mattresses on the floor and double-bunking. It also means ensuring prisons are secure and, importantly, an environment where rehabilitation can take place. In 2013–14 the system struggled to cope, as the prison population grew quickly. The then coalition government rapidly infilled the prison system, largely with temporary accommodation. Rehabilitation was compromised, as prisoners did not feel safe, and there were simply not enough program

rooms, visit spaces or other amenities. In some cases they were being used to house prisoners. As a result, assaults, escapes and recidivism all went up during this chaotic period in our prison system.

As this graph illustrates, running the prison system close to capacity has a clear impact on the ability to rehabilitate prisoners. In 2013 prison numbers grew rapidly and the system jumped past the acceptable upper limit advised by Corrections Victoria. This had far-reaching implications for the system. It created an environment that failed prisoners, and more prisoners returned to the system as a result. For the financial year 2014–15 the prisoner recidivism rate jumped to a record 44.1 per cent. As you can see, that was a 25 per cent increase in the recidivism rate just over a four-year period. The cost of this recidivist offending is considerable, both to the state but also in terms of community safety, and we are focusing on turning those numbers around. We expect the prisoner recidivism rate to reduce this financial year. It is currently tracking at 42 per cent.

Chair, we recognise we will have a growing population in the prison system, and we are putting in place a plan now to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of 2013–2014. Since 2015 we have invested in programs and extra staff to ensure that prisoners do have the best chance to turn their life around. Our plan is to open over 1200 beds, including the new prison at Lara, and this will ensure that the system can cope.

In concluding, Chair, we are committed to ensuring that the prison system is safe and secure, that it is focused on rehabilitation, that it is effective and that it is supporting the government's community safety reform agenda. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. I might commence. The budget paper reference is budget paper 3, page 274. I refer you to the outputs table. The second line item is 'Total annual daily average number of prisoners'. The actual figure in 16–17 was 6853. The expected outcome in 17–18 is 7308. The target for 18–19 is 7850 to 8290, so quite a significant increase. In your presentation you referred to the investment in the expansion of Lara prison. Can you just talk us through that in a little bit more detail? Do you anticipate that when that expansion comes online it will take on the bulk of that increase in expected demand? Are they your thoughts?

Ms TIERNEY — Yes, there has been a significant growth in the prison system for a few years now. It did start in 2013, and that demand has continued. The growth in prison numbers has largely been driven by a number of factors, obviously changes to the parole system. We have seen sentencing reform, we have had tougher bail conditions and of course we have had extra police on the beat and so more people are being picked up. Of course the population in this state is increasing as well. So we are expecting to see prisoner numbers continue to increase, which is why we are planning for future growth.

The trend in rising prisoner numbers is predicted to continue, which is why we are investigating all options. The community safety reforms in particular have led to a steep increase in remanded prisoners, who now make up more than 30 per cent of the total prisoner population. This is a significant increase on the previous decade when remand prisoner numbers remained stable at around 18 to 20 per cent of the overall population. This budget funds the expansion of the Lara prison precinct, adding at least 700 new beds to the system to ensure that we do have the capacity to keep the system safe, secure and focused on rehabilitation. The new beds in the state-of-the-art facilities will mean that we have more investment in health, mental health and other vital programs that help rehabilitate prisoners and improve community safety.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. You mentioned the funding in the budget for the expansion of Lara prison. In broader terms of the 18–19 budget, how many additional prison beds will be funded as a consequence?

Mr T. SMITH — A point of order, Chair, if I could. I am just a bit confused about this prison you are speaking of. Is it in Lara or Bacchus Marsh?

Ms SHING — You do need to answer that. It is the Chair's question.

The CHAIR — It is government time. You are very —

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Order! Minister, in relation to the 2018–19 budget can you just advise the committee how many additional beds will be funded?

Ms TIERNEY — In total, in the 2018–19 budget, there will be over 1200 beds funded: obviously the 700-bed prison at Lara that I have already mentioned; there will also be a new 70-bed unit at Dame Phyllis Frost, including 44 new mental health beds. There are 35 management beds at Fulham, and there are also the additional 473 that I announced in December last year. The budget also provides a project design and planning amount for 140 new beds at Dame Phyllis Frost, and this builds on the 1900 that we have already opened during this term of government.

The CHAIR — Just in relation to the expansion of the Lara prison can you outline for the benefit of the committee the community consultation that has occurred this current financial year in relation to the expansion of the Lara prison?

Ms TIERNEY — Sure. The Department of Justice and Regulation continues to ensure the local community is informed of the project planning and progress as part of an ongoing community engagement process. A dedicated 1800-inquiry phone line and an email address were established for the community to seek further information and to have any questions or concerns answered. Two updates have been distributed to community members who have subscribed to receive updates on the project, one on the intention to negotiate with landowners and also one on the announcement of the actual funding. As part of informing the local community of the intention to purchase land for the building of the new prison a letter was sent to roughly 7300 residents surrounding the current prison precinct. After confirmation of funding, a dedicated website was developed on the government's Engage Victoria website, which is the government's central hub of community information. The department, in particular the executive director of the Barwon south-west area, has met with community leaders in relation to the building of the new prison. I am not sure whether the acting commissioner would like to add further comment.

Acting Comm. WISE — Two other things, Chair. One is that we will establish a community advisory group which everyone will have the opportunity to join — they have proved very, very useful in projects such as the Hopkins Correctional Centre and other large prison projects — so that local community members can provide their advice on things like traffic management, lighting and other related things. And we will be holding community information nights as soon as practicable where people can come and ask questions of us.

The CHAIR — Obviously with an investment of this size and this nature I would imagine that there will be a significant number of construction jobs that will be created as a consequence of that, as well as an increase in employees — FTE from an operational sense. Given Lara's proximity to Geelong and obviously with Ford having exited the local auto manufacturing base, has the government given any thought or consideration to trying to have a targeted local employment program for people who live in the area, from the point of view of a construction perspective but also from an operational perspective post-completion?

Ms TIERNEY — Absolutely. The new maximum security prison will create hundreds of ongoing local jobs and thousands of direct and indirect construction and related jobs. Based on experience of the Ravenhall prison project the prison build could create up to 600 jobs during the peak of construction, and that will be across steel manufacturing, construction and engineering. Also, with the government's VIP policy, that is the Victorian Industry Participation Policy, local content requirements will ensure Victorian contractors, workers and apprentices are given the opportunity to build this prison. Under the Victorian government's Major Projects Skills Guarantee, registered apprentices, trainees and engineering cadets will make up to 10 per cent of the project's total estimated labour hours.

Once the prison is actually operational it is estimated that more than 650 ongoing jobs will be created. In terms of the new correctional facility itself, it will bring hundreds of ongoing jobs to the area with a range of roles, including prison officers, obviously, but also psychologists, teachers, administrative workers, maintenance and of course allied health workers. The new correctional facility will also provide opportunities for a range of local businesses so that they can supply goods and services to the prison, to construction teams and later of course to staff and visitors.

Acting Comm. WISE — All I can add, I think, is that the siting of the prison is terrific from a correctional perspective. It is close enough to Melbourne to allow prisoners to be transported up and down to the metropolitan courts, which is a really important thing, and we have continued to get high-quality staff from the Geelong area for Barwon Prison, Marmongoneet Correctional Centre and the Karreenga annex, so we are pretty confident that we are going to get high-quality staff from that area. Of course there is growth in the broader Geelong area, Grovedale, Barwon Heads —

Ms TIERNEY — Armstrong Creek.

Acting Comm. WISE — Wyndham, Werribee. They are all good growth areas, and so we are pretty assured of a sustainable workforce for the prison. In terms of its placement, we are really pleased and will be able to share some facilities and resources with the other prisons to make them more efficient as well.

Ms WARD — I will get started, but you might find your way back to me. Minister, it is great to see that in your presentation you talk about the dropping of rates of recidivism, which is really pleasing to see, and it is 42 per cent. As you say, you expect it will be lower when your next report comes through, which is very good to see. If I get you to look at budget paper 4, page 69, part way down there is 'Management of serious offenders' and 'Management of serious sex offenders'. Can you please update the committee on what the government is doing in terms of addressing these two particularly serious criminal offenders, or come back to me? You can get started.

Ms TIERNEY — I would love to get started. Over the last two budgets the government has invested over \$390 million to fully fund reforms recommended by Justice Harper in the landmark review.

Ms WARD — We will come back to the Harper review.

Mr MORRIS — Secretary, can I address a question to you? In BP3, page 274, on the stated objective which relates to the management of the state's adult correctional system, can you confirm that a report commissioned following claims of alleged corrupt conduct and impropriety by a senior Corrections Victoria employee at Beechworth prison was recently handed to you as Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation?

Mr WILSON — Yes, there has been, and there have been a number of investigations. Every year there is an audit or something going on. In some instances those are protected disclosures, so I can confirm that report was received.

Mr MORRIS — Can you tell us what the report found and particularly what actions you have taken in response to those findings?

Mr WILSON — I think if it is okay, Deputy Chair, I might take that on notice and get legal advice as to what I can and cannot say about that particular report.

Mr MORRIS — Well, is it true that the report has found that the service delivery outcomes, SDOs, have been manipulated at Beechworth prison to achieve financial advantage for individuals?

Mr WILSON — As I said, we need to be very careful of reports that are initiated from protected disclosures. There are some serious confidentiality provisions around that, but I am happy to take your first question, that question and any other questions you have on notice.

Mr MORRIS — I guess it embraces issues of privilege versus confidentiality.

Mr WILSON — A question I am not qualified to deliberate on, but I am happy to respond to your questions.

Mr MORRIS — We do not want to spend the afternoon having a debate about that either. Bearing in mind what you have said about protected disclosures, to the extent that you can will you give a commitment that the report's findings will be made public in an appropriate form at some point in the future?

Mr WILSON — If it is possible, absolutely, but again that is a legal question that I would need to take advice on.

Mr MORRIS — I understand — as I say, to the extent possible.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 276, which reveals that while there are even more offenders on a community correction order, the amount of work they have been doing has actually decreased, with the performance target missed by a massive 150 000 hours. Are you able to explain that situation?

Ms TIERNEY — Yes, I would. In terms of the community corrections system, what we found when we came into government was that it was under-resourced and underfunded. What we have done is we have injected \$320 million into that service and we have also employed additional staff, taking it up to 900. We have inserted a new case management system that is based on high risk, so it has reduced the actual number of case loads, but it is meaning that those that are at higher risk are more closely supervised and monitored.

We are very proud of what we have been doing in this area. In fact other jurisdictions, whether it be from this country or overseas, come and visit to study what reforms we have done in this particular area. We have actually changed the way that we do business in terms of managing the community corrections area. In terms of community work —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So it would appear, Minister, because they are doing less work.

Ms TIERNEY — In terms of community work —

Ms SHING — You are getting the answer.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — No, I am not.

Ms TIERNEY — In terms of community work, for the third time, we have over 900 active partners operating throughout Victoria to provide offenders with a diverse range of engaging and valuable experiences in order to make changes to their lives. They have been of real use in a number of settings, and I think it is probably given that that is more of an operational matter that the assistant commissioner would further —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Sorry, Minister, you have given me some feedback on the community work issue, but you have not actually addressed the question of why there was 150 000 less hours performed.

Ms SHING — It is set out in the line item. There is an explanation literally under the line item.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Yes, that really explains it, Ms Shing. It does not explain it in any way, shape or form. You talk about the higher risk offenders being more closely supervised but they are actually doing less work.

Acting Comm. WISE — I can certainly assist. In the first instance the courts are handing down fewer orders with community work requirements, and that clearly impacts on the number of community hours that can be performed. The complexity of the cohort is an interesting one, and one of the difficulties that we have operationally is if you have got a group of people who all need to do community work and they are of a higher risk, as we are finding — we are finding about 54 per cent of our community correction order offenders are of that high-risk group — you do not want them to corrupt or contaminate lower risk people on orders at the same time. So you have to take much more care about having groups of offenders together. It is much better if we can find smaller groups to go into individual worksites, and that impacts on the bulk number of hours that you can get out of a group of people. So that is a significant issue.

The other issue is that we have started prioritising a lot of the conditions on community correction orders, which was not done previously. We know that a lot of offenders who are given community correction orders get quite a few conditions for the orders. They might be supervision, attend for mental health treatment, attend for drug and alcohol treatment, do community work — all those sorts of things — and some of these people live such disordered, chaotic lives that they struggle to get out of bed. They cannot possibly attend half a dozen different appointments every week, particularly if they are suffering from something like mental health issues.

So what we are doing is prioritising our approach and saying, 'Let's get the mental health conditions sorted out, or the mental health state of the offender sorted out, and then we can move to having him or her attend for community work'. So that has impacted as well, but the major issue is that we are getting fewer of these ordered by the courts, and then they are of that complexity which makes it more difficult. What we are trying to do though at the same time is, as the minister has already suggested, trying to link in the work that they are doing with some vocational training, so that if they do go and do some landscaping, for example, they might be able to link into the local TAFE college, and that will give them a piece of paper at the end of their order which might improve their chances of getting employment on release.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Which we all of course support, but, Minister, we actually saw damning TV footage of people who were meant to be on such orders playing on their mobile phones and even asleep when they were

meant to be cleaning up graffiti. Are you satisfied then that this reduction in hours is a good thing in terms of corrections in Victoria?

Ms TIERNEY — Since that footage was shown corrections conducted an internal review of the situation, and I think it is appropriate for the assistant commissioner to talk about that.

Acting Comm. WISE — Yes, it is one of those things. We do have some downtime on some of the gangs, as lots of workforces do, and we want to stop that clearly, but we think that some of the footage that was shown on TV was actually taken during the offenders' lunch hour. We thought that it was possibly a little unfair to be filming offenders during their leisure period and using that as an example of how they are not being fully employed. So yes, we impress upon our field officers who supervise the people on community work that they need to keep them actively engaged all the time.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, on the same page — page 276 of BP3 — it indicates that supervised court orders are actually expected to increase by 782 people, but you have actually reduced the target — not the actual but the target — by 100 000 hours of actual community work. Why would it be that there is an increase in the number of people on orders and yet you are forecasting a reduction in the actual hours worked?

Ms TIERNEY — So this is in 'Community-based offender supervision', yes?

The CHAIR — We might come back to that. Ms Pennicuik until 3.01 p.m.

Ms PENNICUIK — Good afternoon, Minister, Acting Commissioner, Secretary and other staff from DJR; thank you for coming. Could I direct you to budget paper 3, page 274, which is titled 'Prisoner supervision and support' and 'Quality — Proportion of benchmark measures in prison services agreement achieved'. If you look there, you will see the proportion of benchmarks has not been achieved over the last few years and this target has not been met by quite a bit. The footnote regarding this says it is because of the high number of remand prisoners, prisoner turnover and increasing complexity.

This year the Auditor-General commented that the budget papers and the annual report of the department of justice provide 'little real insight into the operation of the prison system', and because service agreement contracts are made up of a number of measures, which I understand, I am interested in whether there can be any breakdown of this particular benchmark to provide some detail on what service KPIs are failing to be delivered and where.

Acting Comm. WISE — Perhaps I can answer that. The benchmark in prisons that we struggle with is this one of the aggregated service delivery outcome achievement. There are a couple of reasons for it. One is certainly the complexity of the prisoner population. The remand population is certainly part of that, and the churn in the system or the throughput in the system is a big part of it as well. To let you get a better picture of that, I suppose, several years ago — only three or four years ago — we were averaging about 7000 receptions into the system on an annual basis; we are now at well over 10 000. A lot of those people who are coming through do not stay with us for very long at all. So for those are released on bail — and it is about 32 or 33 per cent of those who come in on remand who are then released on bail — some of them will pick up sentences and some will not, but those who are on remand are on remand for very short periods, and it is that constant turnover which is difficult. It impacts on things like assaults and self-harming incidents and a range of other things. We also use —

Ms PENNICUIK — I am very sorry to interrupt you, Acting Commissioner; it is just I have a very short amount of time. I do understand that; I follow what you are saying. I just wonder whether this metric here could be a bit more detailed in future budget papers and a little bit more detailed in the annual reports following on from what the Auditor-General has said. He also commented that, apart from the Ombudsman's ad hoc reports and the JARO reports — which are not public and I think they should be — certainly aspects of what they report back to the department could be made public. I wonder if you could consider expanding on these reporting benchmarks and the publication of what is going on so there is more transparency.

Mr WILSON — So breaking down that benchmark into some of the key benchmarks underneath that?

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes, into the sorts of things that the acting commissioner was getting to, because it is very blunt there —

Mr WILSON — Yes, it is an aggregate benchmark, so we —

Ms TIERNEY — So it explains and tells the story of what exactly is happening.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes, and the other issue about whether — it is something the minister would know I have been on about it for a long time — publication of stuff from JARO is appropriate.

Ms WARD — Minister, you were responding to my question around budget paper 4, page 69, regarding improving the management of serious violent and serious sex offenders in this state. When we were cut off you were beginning to relate it to the Harper review. If you could please continue.

Ms TIERNEY — Sure. So what I was saying is that this government has invested more than \$390 million to fully fund the reforms that are associated with the outcome of the Justice Harper review, and it includes the expansion of the current scheme beyond serious sex offenders to serious violent offenders. It is about building new facilities to provide more accommodation and of course treatment options, and improving governance and oversight to ensure that offenders on the scheme are receiving a range of interventions which form part of their court orders.

In tangible terms — and of course you will get to know more about this because it is in the Assembly next week — one of the significant legislative reforms that we have done, just as way of background, has been the Community Safety Act, which was passed in 2016, and then we had the serious offender detention supervision governance bill last year, which was basically the infrastructure that was required to establish the post-sentence scheme. Indeed it did establish the independent oversight body called the Post Sentence Authority, and it also of course set up the multi-agency panel to coordinate the many services that are required by these very complex people.

There is also of course money set aside for additional accommodation to support the expansion of the post-sentence scheme and provide more options for courts when considering the most appropriate placement for offenders to reside, because it is a step up, step down system and it is about making sure that there is intense management and treatment so that eventually people can return to the community.

Ms WARD — With these serious sex offender reforms and coming out of the Harper review, can you please talk us through how this will keep our community safer?

Ms TIERNEY — What will occur essentially is that if someone is serving a sentence for a particular serious crime and it becomes clear to those that have been managing that offender that, leading up to that person finishing their sentence, there is an evidence base that this person still will place the community at risk. And that is not guessing; it is about proper clinical assessments that are made. Then there can be two applications made — one from the DPP, one from the secretary — and they go to the court, and the court actually determines what will happen once that person's sentence has finished. That will determine exactly what the court orders need to reflect in terms of treatment, and that is taken on advice from those that know about the clinical impacts and nature of the offending. Also the courts will decide whether the person will be placed at a particular residence, whether it be Corella or the new Rivergum facility that is being built just outside of Ararat.

Ms WARD — So they will be the two places where they will reside?

Ms TIERNEY — They are just two of a number that will be available.

Ms WARD — So are you able to tell us where they will be?

Ms TIERNEY — There is Corella, there is Emu Creek, there is Rivergum and within Barwon as well. There are also community facilities.

Ms WARD — How much is the post-sentence scheme costing?

Ms TIERNEY — All up, in terms of setting up the infrastructure and everything else that is required, it is \$390 million.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, just coming back to the Beechworth issue: it was raised with you in the Council question time on Thursday, and in response to the substantive question you said:

I am not aware of the incident or the report that you are referring to.

In response to the supplementary around confidence in the management of the prison you said:

There have not been matters raised with me in terms of any major difficulties at that facility ...

Minister, when did you become aware that there were some difficulties, or possibly some difficulties, at the facility?

Ms TIERNEY — Thank you for that question, and I stand by the comments that I made in the Parliament. In respect to answering your question today, I am taking legal advice in terms of what I can say.

Mr MORRIS — I asked you when you first became aware of the report.

Ms WARD — I am really not clear. I understand the facility that you have mentioned. I do not understand what this has to do with the budget papers.

Ms TIERNEY — That is part of the advice I am seeking — what I can disclose.

Mr MORRIS — So you cannot tell us when you first became aware of the report?

Ms WARD — Raising your voice does not help anyone answer the question, Mr Morris, but I am still not sure how this relates to the budget papers.

Mr MORRIS — You have arrived, have you? Good to see you.

Ms WARD — I have been at a funeral this morning, Mr Morris. There is no need to be rude.

Mr MORRIS — You are not prepared to tell the committee? Even though the Chair has indicated clearly that there is an obligation on witnesses to be truthful and to respond, you are not prepared to do that? I am not asking for the contents of the report; I am asking you to tell us when you became aware of it.

Mr WILSON — Deputy Chair, can I just explain the reason the minister was not informed? I think that was the point you had made about the question in Parliament.

Mr MORRIS — I am asking when the minister became aware of it — the date?

Ms SHING — You either want the explanation or you do not, Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — I do not need a process explanation; I just want a date.

Ms SHING — You are not after any context, which the secretary has just offered you?

Mr MORRIS — A date — that is all we are asking for.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Chair, a point of order: what has this got to do with the budget?

The CHAIR — I will let the question stand because there is a budget paper reference, it does relate to expenditure in the prison system and I think it is entirely fair and reasonable for the opposition to ask the question. The witness has indicated, though, that there might be some legal issues in relation to providing a —

Mr MORRIS — I asked when she became aware of the report.

Ms SHING — Which the secretary is prepared to explain.

Mr MORRIS — I do not think so.

Members interjecting.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, are you declining to answer the question?

Ms TIERNEY — I am seeking legal advice on this matter. In terms of notification I received notification of it in correspondence dated the 14th of this month.

Mr MORRIS — Thank you.

Ms SHING — No, that is correspondence in relation to it. Again the secretary has offered to provide you with context. The minister has indicated she stands by responses she has already given in the Parliament.

Mr MORRIS — Ms Shing, we will ask our questions; you ask yours.

Ms SHING — And on this basis you have still declined to get further information from the secretary.

Mr MORRIS — Go for your life; knock yourself out.

Members interjecting.

Mr MORRIS — This is becoming problematic. We have been ready to move on for at least a minute now, and we have been subjected to this.

Mr T. SMITH — Very briefly, Minister, how many female prisoners and, separately, how many male prisoners does the budget estimate will be on remand as of 30 June this year and 30 June 2019? I am happy for you to take it on notice if you cannot provide it today.

Ms TIERNEY — Not needed, thank you. There is a higher increase in the number of remand prisoners when it comes to women.

Mr T. SMITH — I have only got 10 seconds. I just need male and female projections this year and to June 2019.

Ms TIERNEY — The remand figure for women is 47 per cent —

The CHAIR — Ms Patten until 3.15 p.m.

Ms PATTEN — Good afternoon, Minister, Secretary and Acting Commissioner. I was considering this issue and I certainly was interested, Acting Commissioner, in your comments around mental health. Certainly all of the indications are that there is considerable mental illness in our corrections system. I was saying to the Treasurer that we are spending \$700 million on mental health beds and about the same on prisons, yet it seems that prisons are also mental health beds. I was wondering: how much does it cost to keep a prisoner in prison per year?

Mr WILSON — Depending on the security level, 120 000 to 150 000. Acting Commissioner, is that —

Acting Comm. WISE — That is correct. It is obviously a lot cheaper for minimum security and a lot more expensive for the front end.

Ms PATTEN — Of course. So just on average it is around that. We know that probably close to 50 per cent are going in with an existing or previous mental health issue. In the figures I cannot see what sort of mental health services are being offered to not only our prisoners but also those on community services, and I was wondering if you could tell me the services being offered. You mentioned that for community orders there were some.

Acting Comm. WISE — Certainly in the community we are doing a fair bit of work, and we have just been able to secure half a dozen mental health services in the community so that people on community correction orders and people on parole can get exclusive access to those mental health services. That is a big advance for people on community orders.

Ms PATTEN — And that is new?

Acting Comm. WISE — That is new. In the prison system everyone gets a psychiatric screening as they come through, but the biggest advance in mental health treatment has been the opening of the Ravenhall Correctional Centre in November of last year. Prior to that we had an acute ward of 16 beds at the Melbourne Assessment Prison. There is a 75-bed unit at Ravenhall, of which there are about 51 acute and subacute beds and then a smaller unit of about 11 for complex needs — people who might have personality disorders or be

difficult — and then a transitional unit as well. So those 75 beds plus another 100 outpatient beds at Ravenhall are certainly providing much better access to mental health than we had previously.

Ms PATTEN — Certainly in considering the growth of prisoner numbers that we are anticipating and that we have seen I was wondering if you could comment. I looked at the Netherlands, where they are reducing — they are down to 68 prisoners per 100 000; we are on 138 and rising. Has there been any consideration of what those overseas models are doing and the successes that they are finding in reducing the number of prisoners?

Acting Comm. WISE — We look at those jurisdictions all the time. The Netherlands is one, Scandinavian countries are another and Canada, for that matter, as well. There are significant differences not just in the correctional systems, though, but in the community and the tolerance of the community for people convicted of certain crimes being managed in the community rather than in custody and so on. And the style of prison system is very, very different, so in Sweden, for example, I think they have only 6000 prisoners, whereas we have over 7000 now. We have got about 17 prisons —

The CHAIR — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Corrections, the Honourable Gayle Tierney, MLC; Mr Wilson; and Mr Wise. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response should be provided within 10 business days of that request.

Witnesses withdrew.