

Taskforce Flaxton



To:



Taskforce Flaxton

Subject:

SUBMISSION TO TASKFORCE FLAXTON, QUEENSLAND CCC

Attachments:

anonymous submission on qcs prisons to flaxton taskforce.docx

Goof Afternoon

Please find attached our submission to your examination of corruption and corruption risks in Queensland corrective services facilities.

If accepted, we would like this submission to be treated as anonymous in relevant publications and on the CCC website as we fear possible retribution to our son or ourselves for speaking out against the current QCS system.

We are, however, willing to have ongoing dialogue with your taskforce if you think that would be useful to your investigations.

Thank you for undertaking this examination of the very real corruption in QCS facilities.



I am the parent of a prisoner in Queensland and I write this submission after six years of extensive exposure to the Queensland prison system. In this time I have seen a significant decline in the quality of life of those incarcerated in Queensland prisons. The policy changes that have been enacted negatively impact inmates and seem to have coincided with a continued decline in their treatment by front line staff. It is as if the continued imposition of additional punishments somehow encourages prison officers' abuse of inmates.

The open hostility with which the prison officers interact with inmates is astounding. The hatred that officers openly display towards inmates has seeped into every aspect of the prison system to the point where those few who do not display open hostility are met with allegations of inappropriate behaviour.

Corruption is rife within Queensland Corrections Service. In my opinion the single most inexcusable display of corruption is the failure of those in Corrections to make any genuine attempts at correcting. Their refusal to adopt best practice corrections and instead continue to operate a punitive system that not only fails to rehabilitate but actively abuses and degrades inmates, is tantamount to corruption.

Any other organisation with this level of tax payer funding would be subject to open scrutiny by the public regarding their successes and failures. Instead we have a situation where the policies are dictated by the "Courier Mail test" whereby any policy that could be seen as being of benefit to an inmate is discarded in favour of more punishment and restrictions that are often counter-productive to the rehabilitation process.

What contributes to excessive use of force, misuse of information and other abuses?

The current punitive environment where officers see their role as the facilitation of punishment would seem to be the major contributing factor to all of the practices that negatively impact inmates. In order to combat this, QCS employees need to be educated about what their role actually is.

Inmates are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment.

This is simply not understood in Queensland. Prisoners in Queensland are not allowed to speak to the media. Newspapers cannot reproduce something that an inmate has written or said. Changing the laws around this issue may lead to more transparency in the system.

The recent introduction of body-worn cameras was welcomed by inmates who then despaired when it became apparent that the cameras were not worn by those who are the most common perpetrators of abuse nor worn at times when abuse is premeditated such as cell searches, urine tests, strip searches, and at other times where force is used on inmates.

In addition to these issues, body-worn cameras are able to be turned off and Officers have the ability to select what is and is not recorded even when wearing the device. Making body cameras mandatory and ensuring that they are recording at all times would go some way toward reducing abuse towards inmates by prison staff.

What are most significant corruptions risks in Queensland prisons?

Queensland does not offer wide spread access to opiate replacement therapy (ORT). Tobacco is banned, as is music above the lowest classification level (moderate). Movies above an M rating

and any image depicting a female that can be considered even remotely suggestive (including bare midriff or short skirt) is prohibited. These restrictions feed a flourishing and extensive black market. A review of these punitive policies would result in a reduction in the prison black market.

Boredom is seen to significantly contribute towards an inmate's desire to pursue the items listed above that are available through the prison's black market. Modifying the COPD's that currently prevent inmates from purchasing gaming consoles would enable inmates an excellent behavioural incentive. Games consoles would give inmates something to distract them from seeking out alternate, albeit negative, means of occupying their time during the countless hours that are spent idle.

What policy changes could minimise corruption in Queensland prisons?

In relation to prison officers profiting from inmates, implementation of ORT, lifting restrictions on music, movies, TV shows and images would reduce the need for a black market. Regarding prison officers abusing inmates physically, it is the punitive attitude of those within the prison system that permit these abuses to occur. Without addressing the poisonous culture that exists within Queensland prisons, this cannot and will not change.

There are countless policies within Queensland prisons that are designed to demean and degrade inmates in the interest of punishment. Despite this, the failure to give inmates access to what is required to give them the best chance of rehabilitation, is, as I said, the most inexcusable form of corruption.

Traineeships and apprenticeships are not permitted in Queensland prisons. Medium security classifications have been removed and the limited space in low security facilities results in the majority of inmates serving their entire sentence in high security centres. Life-sentenced inmates are banned from low security prisons resulting in lifers being released from high security prisons directly into the community.

There is no access to work release programs that enable inmates to gain valuable work skills and save money for release thus increasing their chances of successful reintegration. Similarly, weekend release and home detention - designed to ensure successful integration - are not permitted in Queensland. For inmates to be properly rehabilitated they need access to legitimate job training and qualifications as well as the ability to progress through decreasing levels of security and access to gradual reintegration programs.

To minimise corruption in QCS there needs to be a shift in purpose from punishment to rehabilitation. This will result in a change in the calibre of QCS employee that is attracted to the role and foster a more positive culture within the system.

A system based on punishment may profit those working within the system and satisfy those within the community seeking vengeance but does nothing to improve the behaviours of prisoners and perpetuates a cycle of crime.