



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 3 June 2014

PRISON OFFICER, COMMUNITY SAFETY AT RISK FROM OVERCROWDED PRISONS

NSW prisons are struggling to cope with a prison population boom, placing prison officer and community safety at risk, according to the Public Service Association of NSW (PSA).

“We are equally concerned about what happens when offenders who have already displayed bad behavior are granted parole to make room in crowded prisons,” PSA spokesperson Jenny Singleton said today.

“But the State Government will sometimes allow parole even if former prisoners are without adequate supervision, have displayed unacceptable behavior in custody or have no suitable accommodation, which can only increase the chances of reoffending in the community.

“Last year, the union warned that the closure of seven out of eight half-way houses meant former prisoners would be detained until suitable accommodation could be found for their release into the community.”

Ms Singleton said prison officers were in significant danger when inmates kept in crowded conditions knew bad behavior might not affect their parole.

“Overcrowding puts the safety of both prisoners and staff at risk and the government needs to address this problem before a serious incident occurs,” she said.

“In NSW the prison population has already increased by 13% in a year, new mandatory sentencing laws for alcohol-related violence will result in even more prisoners being added to that population.

“The PSA is very concerned about the potential for violence breaking out, which our members have to deal with.

“The danger is made worse by the changes to the NSW workers compensation system. When the amendments were made, police officers were given an exemption due to the dangerous nature of their work. However, prison officers were given no exemption. This has led to some being left with no financial support after being injured on the job,” Ms Singleton said.