



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **Prison officers lock the gates in workers comp fight**

The Prison Officers Vocational Branch (POVB) of the Public Service Association of NSW have voted unanimously to refuse entry to any new inmates in their fight to secure the same workers compensation entitlements as police.

The decision to ban new prisoners took effect from 27 June 2014.

Prison Officers lost many of their workers compensation entitlements in the 2012 reform of the system by the State Government.

This means they now have limited protection should they be injured in what is the most violent working environment in the country.

While Police were given an exemption from the reforms by the State Government, Prison Officers were not and face going to work each day with less of a safety net should they be injured.

Police are still covered for all reasonable medical expenses, have access to lump sum payments for pain and suffering and impairment provided that impairment is at least 1% of full body and their families can claim for 'nervous shock' if an officer is killed or injured at work.

In contrast, payment of medical costs for Prison Officers ceases one year after a claim unless there is 30% full body impairment, there can be no claims for pain and suffering with any lump sum requiring at least 10% full body impairment and their families cannot claim 'nervous shock'.

The growing prison population is placing the corrections system under enormous stress, not only slashing prison officer to inmate ratios to dangerously low levels but heightening the ever-present risk of violence by frustrated prisoners.

When this violence does occur, prison officers have to step in and put their bodies on the line, all too often in confrontations with individuals who have nothing to lose.

In a desperate attempt to safeguard their wellbeing, prison officers will now no longer accept any new inmates unless space is first made within the respective facility by the release of others.

"This was not a decision Prison Officers took lightly," said POVB Chair, Steve McMahon, "But the slogan, 'We face what you fear' is a simple fact of life for them. They proudly stand between some of the state's most notorious criminals and the community but should not be expected to do so without adequate protection for them and their families."

"A soaring prison population has exacerbated the problem, which will be made even worse with the so called One Punch laws."

"In some gaols, it's not uncommon for 20 prison officers to be on duty to supervise more than 300 inmates."

"Job cuts combined with casualisation has left them more exposed to danger on a daily basis than ever. Yet if they are injured there is only limited workers compensation to provide any support," said Steve McMahon.

Once prisons have reached capacity, any additional inmates will need to be held in court cells or police custody until the issue is resolved.