



Media release

For immediate release

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*Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod
Moderator Rev Kaye Ronalds*

Uniting Church: Justice reforms will damage youth

Queensland Uniting Church Moderator, Rev Kaye Ronalds, is concerned that proposed Youth Justice Reforms being introduced to the Queensland Parliament this week will further damage, demonise and criminalise young people caught up in the Youth Justice system.

Ms Ronalds calls for the Queensland Government to pause and “honestly assess the helpfulness of the proposed Youth Justice reforms and the likely impacts on young people and on society”.

Ms Ronalds says, “There is no transparency of process behind developing the reforms as submissions made by churches and community groups have not been made public.

“The Uniting Church in Queensland recognises that young repeat offenders tend to be of low socioeconomic status, perform poorly at school, have significant physical and mental health needs, developmental disorders and have a history of child abuse and neglect,” she says.

“Apart from the formal programs of counselling, crisis lines and support programs for youth and vulnerable families, churches have many points of contact with young people. From that experience we have learned that some young people will stray into crime but, with the right support, can make a new start and become valuable citizens. I am not convinced that the proposed reforms to the Youth Justice take account of that.

“We are alarmed to note that around 70 per cent of children and young people in the youth justice system are known to the child protection system. We are also very concerned by the high rates of incarceration among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.”

Queensland Churches Together (QCT) General Secretary, the Rev Canon Richard Tutin, supports the call and asks the relevant Parliamentary Committee to include fully open and accountable public consultation.

“We ask that this committee takes on board relevant learning from experts in the field: support agencies, community groups, churches and individuals. We suggest that a round table discussion would be most useful, enabling everyone to listen together about best practice,” he says.

ENDS

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N.B.: The Moderator is the spiritual head and key spokesperson for the Uniting Church in Queensland. The Moderator is elected by Uniting Church members and rotates every three years. Ms Ronalds is the first female Queensland Moderator.