

MEDIA RELEASE

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ASHLEY YOUTH DETENTION CENTRE

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Leanne McLean has called on the Tasmanian Government to urgently establish a rapid response crisis team on the ground at Ashley Youth Detention Centre, inclusive of specialist leadership skills and child safe practitioner expertise.

“This team should be focused on both the wellbeing of detainees and the wellbeing of the staff who remain at the centre and should remain as a transitional arrangement while the new model is agreed ahead of the closure.”

“Current chronic low staffing levels have worsened, and I am extremely concerned at the current restrictive practices, including a return to rolling lockdowns, and their impacts on the immediate safety and wellbeing of the children and young people detained there,” Ms McLean said.

“The current situation at Ashley has further deteriorated and is likely to remain that way for at least several weeks. This constitutes a gross failure to uphold the rights of children as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Ms McLean said the hearings of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s responses to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse particularly at Ashley were finalised on Friday.

“The evidence was confronting and very challenging for many in our community, particularly the many victim-survivors and those affected by child sexual abuse.

“The impact of the hearings on staff and staffing levels at Ashley – and therefore the children’s safety and wellbeing – was anticipated.”

However, Ms McLean said there appeared to be no sense of urgency regarding this fact and no plans were put in place to further bolster staffing prior to the hearings and prevent a return to rolling lockdowns.

Ms McLean said she understands and acknowledges the significant and complex issues currently impacting on Ashley and the efforts taken to recruit and train new staff.

“The closure of Ashley and transition to a new model of detention cannot be achieved in a manner that promotes the rights and wellbeing of children and young people overnight.



“However, the Tasmanian Government’s response to the immediate appalling conditions at Ashley remains disproportionate to the level of impact on the safety and wellbeing of young people currently detained there.”

Ms McLean said a new Executive Director for Youth Justice Reform has commenced, and more staff are expected in coming weeks.

“However, these appointments will not bear an impact on the immediate safety and wellbeing of detainees for some time yet.

“In the meantime, children and young people as young as 11 are locked in their cells, for varying periods of time and are experiencing resultant declines in their behaviour, and their wellbeing, including attempts at self-harm. The vast majority of them have not even been sentenced.”

Ms McLean has written to the Minister for Education, Children and Youth Roger Jaensch about the Ashley crisis.

“I call on the Tasmanian Government for urgent action including interim measures to be put in place at Ashley immediately to ensure the safety of children and young people.

“Counsel Assisting the Commission of Inquiry said in her closing remarks: *‘There appears to be a lack of urgency from the government to change the situation for these children, nearly all of whom are on remand. A failure to act now and implement a transition plan before Ashley’s closure will see children continue to be subjected to inhumane and degrading conditions and continue to be at risk of child sex abuse.’*

“I agree entirely with this sentiment. This situation requires an immediate innovative, child-centred and trauma-informed response.

Ms McLean said she was extremely concerned that older young people might be sent to Risdon Prison.

“Transferring the children currently detained under the Youth Justice Act 1997 to an adult custodial facility is not an acceptable response.”

Quick Facts:

- The Commissioner called for the closure of AYDC in September 2021 [CCYP-Media-AYDC-091021.pdf \(childcomm.tas.gov.au\)](#)
- The Commissioner’s views on what is required to establish a truly therapeutic youth justice system in Tasmania can be found here [2022-03-21-FINAL-Reforming-Youth-Justice-submission.pdf \(childcomm.tas.gov.au\)](#)

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