



Parole Amendment Bill Law and Order Committee

The Salvation Army (New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory) Submission

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and thirty years. The Army provides a wide-range of practical social, community and faith-based services, particularly for those who are suffering, facing injustice or those who have been forgotten and marginalised by mainstream society.
- 1.2 We have over 90 community ministry centres and churches (corps) across the nation, serving local families and communities. We are passionately committed to our communities as we aim to fulfil our mission of caring for people, transforming lives and reforming society by God's power.¹ The Salvation Army also has a well-established Courts and Prisons Services located throughout New Zealand. This service provides Court Officers and Prison Chaplains who offer advice and practical support to those facing the court process.
- 1.3 This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit (SPPU) of The Salvation Army. This Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by advocating for policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand.
- 1.4 This submission has been approved by Commissioner Robert Donaldson, the Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army's New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

2. THE SALVATION ARMY PERSPECTIVE

- 2.1 We applaud the action to reduce the number of unnecessary parole hearings on occasions where the offender is highly unlikely to have parole granted. We submit this will likely reduce any potential anxiety felt by victims. These amendments could also reduce the likelihood of offenders and their families being given any false hope of release via numerous parole hearings.
- 2.2 We also support the proposed introduction of *risk milestones* to be given to offenders by the Parole Board to be met prior to being reconsidered as they will likely give an incentive for offenders to change their behaviour to ensure their parole and release. We applaud the introduction of measurable

¹ <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/mission/>

goals for offenders to work towards and we believe any investment and focus on effective rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives can only be another positive contribution to our criminal justice system.

Therefore, we generally support this bill.

- 2.3 However we wish to bring to this Committee's attention the added stress that the implementation of such risk milestones are likely to place on rehabilitation programs which are already running at or near capacity.
- 2.4 The need for greater investment in rehabilitation and reintegration programs has been emphasised by The Salvation Army in previous submissions to this and other select committees. While we acknowledge that this Government has increased spending in this area, we contend there is still some room for improvement. If risk milestones are to be met by an offender prior to being granted parole, we submit that there must be further investment in programs that would enable offenders to actually meet these milestones. In addition to this, there have been issues raised regarding the accessibility of existing rehabilitation courses to some members of the inmate population. If milestones must be met before parole is granted, it is important that inmates are given adequate opportunities to access programs that may assist them to meet these milestones regardless of their command of the written or spoken English language or any disability issues.
- 2.5 We also wish to acknowledge that while the Bill does not aim to increase the length of time served by offenders, the introduction of risk milestones into the Parole Board's consideration may sometimes inadvertently increase the length of time served if there are not enough opportunities for the inmate to complete or fulfil their risk milestones. Therefore, there may need to be increased capacity for some specific courses currently available in order to allow offenders to meet the risk milestones set for them.

3. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

- 3.1 We support the action allowed for by *clause 9* to increase the maximum time between parole hearings in order to reduce the number of hearings where it is unlikely the offender will be granted parole, provided that this does not prevent those deserving of parole being granted from receiving a hearing before the two year deadline.
- 3.2 We support the added requirement, made by *clause 10*, of the Parole Board, when declining parole or handing down a postponement order, to clearly state when the offender will next be considered for parole.
- 3.3 We support the requirement, created by *clause 11* of the Bill, for Department of Corrections staff to notify the Parole Board, "as soon as practicable", of an offender's meeting of the risk milestones set for them by the Parole Board. We submit this allows those who make real efforts to improve themselves to be granted parole at an earlier date. This could also act as an incentive for inmates to more effectively engage with rehabilitation programmes. On some occasions, the inmates may be unlikely to apply for early consideration themselves. Therefore the requirement of

the Department of Corrections staff to notify the Parole Board as soon as is practicable will ensure that these people will be considered for parole. Furthermore, this could also reduce the risk that lengthening the time between parole hearings will lead to longer periods served. However caution must be taken to ensure that rehabilitation programmes are not simply used by inmates to gain an earlier parole date, but are effective in minimising the risk that paroled offenders may pose to the community.

4. CONCLUSION

The Salvation Army generally supports this Bill. In our experience, parole hearings where the offender has little chance of parole being granted can at times create false hope in the offender and their family, but it can also create unnecessary stress and anxiety among victims.

While we support the introduction of risk milestones into the parole process and the incentive they will likely give offenders to take action and confront their offending behaviour, we submit that greater investment is still required in rehabilitation programs, particularly if participation in such programmes are part of the new milestones.

The Salvation Army has advocated on many occasions for the need for increased investment into quality rehabilitation and reintegration programs within our prisons. The introduction of risk milestones will likely create an even greater need for rehabilitation programmes in order to meet demand without compromising the quality of these courses. In addition to this we would like to ensure that rehabilitation programs will be accessible to those with a disability and/or do not have a good command of English as to not prevent them being able to fulfil the risk milestones set for them.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Bill.

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