



**Legal and Social Issues Committee
Legislative Council**

Inquiry: Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration

Hearing date: 9 May 2022

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Larissa Strong, Commissioner, Corrections Victoria

1. Ms Burnett-Wake, Page no. 60

Question asked.

In a letter provided to the committee, the Minister for Corrections noted that more than \$3 million over three years is being provided in the 2022–23 state budget to expand the family visits programs for prisoners, to help repair relationships and assist with reunification of family units.

... Over four years. Okay. So \$3 million over four years

It was just we are unclear if these initiatives will be led by Corrections Victoria or external providers, so we were just wondering if you could give us any insight into how that funding is going to be allocated and who is going to be managing it and what programs it may go into.

Response:

The Family Visits Support Program is in addition to any personal or professional visits that people in prison already receive. This is a structured program which facilitates supported visits with people in prison and their families to repair, reunite and strengthen relationships prior to their release from prison.

With the assistance of an experienced and specialist contracted service provider, both prisoners and their family members are guided and encouraged to work towards improving communication skills and employing strategies to support positive and meaningful visits. The program also offers small group sessions, and individual follow-up sessions, which assist with identifying pro-social relationships that can be developed, and help in workshopping common barriers to effective communication that impact on the quality of visits. These sessions also help provide tangible and practical strategies to take into personal visits, based on the participants' needs and interests (such as activities, conversation suggestions, maintaining a focus on keeping visits positive). The program can be accessed by both remanded and sentenced cohorts.

The Family Visits Support Program provides prisoners with support to maximise outcomes from visits with family and loved ones and to build skills that will carry over into in-person visits and connections after release. The building and strengthening of relationships enabled by the supported visits program is congruent with the recognition of the important role family and



children play in the successful reintegration of prisoners. This program is currently only available to women in prison and their families.

The Department is extending this program into the men's prison system. While a procurement approach is currently being determined, it is intended that an external community organisation will deliver the service, which can then continue to provide community support and networks in the community.

2. The Chair, Page No. 63

Question Asked

Could I just quickly ask about communications? Certainly, a number of the people that we spoke to struggled with the cost of making a phone call, particularly to a mobile phone. Given that that really is the main communication, can I understand why it is so expensive? They were telling me it would cost about \$7 to make a phone call to a mobile phone

Response:

Phone calls are only one method of communication for prisoners to maintain contact with their family, friends and support networks whilst in custody. The current cost of mobile phone calls made by prisoners through the Prisoner Telephone System is \$0.30 cents for call connection, with a rate of \$0.60 cents per minute with a minimum call charge of \$0.30 cents.

Prisoners now have access to free video visits. Video visits provide the ability for prisoners to engage with families in their home environment, and to have visits from families who are living interstate, overseas or in remote areas where in-person visits would not otherwise have been possible.

The contract for the Prisoner Telephone System (PTS) was executed in 2019 and the term of the contract is six years with two 2-year extension options. The costs paid by prisoners for telephone calls contributes to the costs of maintaining the prisoner telephone system. Costs being higher than in the community are a function of the advanced requirements of a telephony system within a custodial setting which provides the ability for staff to listen to call recordings and monitor calls (including live calls) through speech analytic methods and call monitoring information systems.

In addition to phone calls, prisoners have access to an 'email-a-prisoner' service and posted mail.

Further enhancements to communication channels available for prisoners and their family, friends and support networks are being explored, including improvements to the email-a-prisoner system. Port Phillip Prison has recently commenced a new video calling platform to enhance remote contact between prisoners and their support networks, and Ravenhall Correctional Centre has also introduced new in-cell technology to enable secure and remote contact with family and friends.