



Legal and Social Issues Committee
Legislative Council

Inquiry: Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration

Hearing Date: 30 March 2022

Question taken on notice

Directed to: Professor Susan Dennison, Director, Transforming Corrections to Transform Lives,
Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University

The Chair (Page 36):

[Are you able to provide] economic modelling around the ongoing cost of the harm that is done to the child of an incarcerated parent?

Response:

Unfortunately, there is very limited data to support accurate costings of the impact of parental incarceration on children at present. The Queensland Productivity Commission conservatively estimated indirect costs to families of prisoners of \$48,000 every time a person is imprisoned. However, the costs to government services are likely to be substantially higher than this. For example, we know that parental incarceration can increase risks for children being placed in Out of Home Care (OoHC) and engaging in youth offending.

In Queensland, the cost of having one child in out-of-home care for 3.8 years (estimated average period in care) is **\$286,212** (or \$402 per child per day). The cost of sending one child to detention for 56 days, which is the average number of days a young person spends in custody, is **\$59,613** (or \$1064.51 per day). Community-based supervision of a child or young person for three months costs **\$24,413** (or \$271.26 per child per day). By contrast, evidence-based programs for young people who have offended or are at risk of offending, such as multi-systemic therapy, costs approximately \$9,760 per child for an average of four months, while the Tasmanian government's Working Together program costs \$24,166 per child¹. It is likely that significant cost savings can be achieved by investing in programs that support incarcerated parents and their children, reducing contact with child protection services, time spent in OoHC and youth justice system involvement.

Due to a lack of economic modelling in this domain, we cannot reliably estimate whole-of-government downstream savings that can be achieved through intervention and prevention initiatives. Government should invest in better data collection around parental incarceration and develop linked, population-based, administrative data sets that would enable the intergenerational costs of parental criminal justice system contact and incarceration to be modelled and the cost-benefits of interventions to be ascertained.

¹ www.treasury.tas.gov.au/Documents/2020-21-Budget-Paper-No-2-Volume-1.pdf