

Media release



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GOVERNMENT FAILS TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE BY PLACING THEM IN ADULT PRISONS

The Tasmanian Government's practice of holding children in the state's adult prisons is putting their safety at risk, and this must change, says Custodial Inspector Richard Connock.

In releasing his [*Children in Tasmania's prisons – review report 2025*](#), which was tabled in State Parliament today, Mr Connock said children being held in the state's adult prisons^ were exposed to threats of sexual abuse, violent behaviour and inhumane and degrading treatment.

"Children should not be in prison. This is the clear conclusion from this report," Mr Connock said.

"And yet, in spite of the findings of the Commission of Inquiry and the significant youth justice reform agenda currently underway, children and young people continue to be held in prison watch-houses*, exposing them to all manner of violations of their human rights."

Mr Connock said the Tasmanian government was failing to adhere to the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023's* Child and Youth Safe Standards.

"Placing children in the same space as adults being held for a range of offences, including child sex offences, clearly does not meet these standards," he said.

"Many children have informed us that watch-houses are noisy and that they can hear adults shouting at all hours.

"One child told us that while in a watch-house they were subjected to threats of sexual abuse by an adult held in a cell nearby."

Mr Connock said children were often spending more than 24 hours in prison watch houses without adequate support – for either the child or the supervising correctional officers.

"TPS staff expressed to us concerns about being ill-equipped to manage children in their care – which is understandable given they work in an adult prison," he said.

"Correctional officers in adult prisons are also not required to hold working with vulnerable people registration, despite such registration being a critical measure to establish if someone is suitable to work with children.

"Concerningly, even my staff are not required to be registered to work with vulnerable people. I nonetheless require it. The Tasmania Prison Service does not."

Mr Connock said his inspection staff also found the TPS was not adhering to *Youth Justice Act 1997* requirements when it came to searching children and young people in prison watch

houses, which includes requiring any searches to be conducted by people who are the same gender as the child.

“In Hobart, girls have been particularly affected, with 21 cases recorded of girls – some as young as 13 – being searched by two males since December 2022. This was more than 12% of all receptions of girls during that time.”

Mr Connock said the Tasmanian government needed to act urgently to address the recommendations raised in his report.

“These watch-houses look, feel, smell, sound and function like prisons,” he said. “The vast majority of people held there are adults, and they are run by prison staff with a background in managing adults, not children.

“Despite the commitment to improving standards, operational practices and services, and concerns being raised by the Commissioner for Children and Young People about the wellbeing of children in prison watch-houses, they nonetheless continue to be detained in them.

“Given the current debate in the community about youth crime, including the prospect of ‘adult time for adult crime’, it is timely to reflect on the realities of adult prison and whether, as a community, we actually want children in such an environment. This report demonstrates we should not.

“Too often in our inspection work we have spoken with children in Ashley Youth Detention Centre only to later speak with them in prison. The trajectory is rarely positive, for the child or the community more broadly.

“Keeping children out of prison watch-houses is an important element of a therapeutic approach to youth justice, yet these spaces are the entry point for almost every child that is taken into custody (and not eligible for police bail or unconditionally released). This needs to change.

“I have made 12 recommendations in this report, and I call on the Tasmanian government to implement them without delay to comply with its obligation to keep children safe.”

^It is important to note that this report has been compiled following inspections of the prison watch-houses in the Hobart and Launceston Reception Prisons only, not watch-houses in Tasmania Police stations, which fall outside the jurisdiction of the Office of the Custodial Inspector.

**Children are held in the Hobart and Launceston Reception Prison watch-houses if the police, having concluded their initial inquiries, determine they are ineligible for bail, or if they grant bail on conditions and the child is to be kept in custody until they meet those conditions. See page 28 to 31 of the report for more information.*

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Please note the Custodial Inspector is unable to make further comment than what is in this release and the report.