

NLAF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAF – August 2018

The NLAF Prisoners Forum met on 23 August 2018. Key issues discussed at the meeting included:

Closure of Nara Ngura Program at Long Bay Correctional Centre

Dianne Anagnos from Kingsford Legal Centre (KLC) reported the Nara Ngura drug and alcohol program at Long Bay Correctional Centre is being shut down. The program has been running for around 15 years and involves an intensive three-month therapeutic program with daily group meetings for prisoners, twice a week counselling and one on one sessions. KLC understands it has been very successful. KLC has been involved with the program for a long time, receiving referrals from the welfare workers for legal matters such as victims compensation and other civil matters, and also participates in agency days where multiple agencies attend to offer services to prisoners graduating from the program.

The last agency day will be in September, with the program to be wound up in November. KLC raised the issue to bring the closure to the attention of NLAF Forum members and to find out what alternative will be introduced once the program has finalised. KLC has just written to the Commissioner to enquire about this issue but understands that the EQUIPS program has been raised as a possible alternative. Jeremy Tucker from Corrective Services noted that the EQUIPS program is not intended to replace the Nara Ngura program and is run across the whole of NSW.

Stacy Williams and/or Jeremy Tucker will respond to this issue at the next meeting. In the meantime, KLC will advise once they receive a response from Corrective Services NSW.

WDOs in custody and Victims Restitution Order (VRO) Debts

We had been advised that WDOs could not be undertaken for VRO debts in custody. A letter was sent on 30 May 2018 to Corrective Services regarding this issue by the acting Chair of NLAF, asking that this policy be reviewed. A response was received from Corrective Services NSW on 6 July 2018, noting that Corrective Services NSW has now reconsidered its decision and that WDOs will now include VRO debts for prisoners in custody. We are grateful to everyone who assisted with this letter.

NLAF Joint Subcommittee on Prisoners and Drivers Licences

As noted in the last report in May 2018, an MOU exists between Roads and Maritime Services and Corrective Services NSW to assist prisoners to exit custody having completed the relevant written test as a first step to obtain their L plate drivers licence. This does not address, however, the legal issues that arise where the prisoner's licence has been disqualified. Prisoners also must have a birth certificate to obtain a drivers licence. It should be noted that the Corrective Services program which assists Aboriginal prisoners to obtain a birth certificate is continuing. A subcommittee has been formed to address the issue of prisoners and drivers licences, comprised of members from the NLAF Prisoners Forum and the NLAF Fines and Traffic Law Forum, as well as relevant staff from RMS, Births Deaths and Marriages and Corrective Services NSW.

Confidentiality of AVLs and lawyer and prisoner face-to-face meetings

An issue was raised regarding the lack of confidentiality of AVLs and face-to-face lawyer and prisoner meetings in correctional facilities. This is because both the AVL suites and meeting rooms are not

sufficiently noise proof. Prisoners are also provided with a phone to speak to their lawyers in a communal space on occasion at some facilities. It was acknowledged that Corrective Services staff do what they can within the physical environment to ensure confidentiality and that the buildings and facilities are pre-existing and the extent to which they can be modified is limited.

This issue will be addressed by Corrective Services NSW at the next meeting.

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is 15 November 2018.

Camilla Pandolfini

NLAF Prisoners Forum Chair, September 2018