

Women Lawyers call on SA Government to fund mother and baby facilities in SA prison system

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*'In all actions concerning children,
whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions,
courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies,
the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'*
-United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Women Lawyers' Association of South Australia (WLASA) calls on the South Australian Minister for Correctional Services, the Hon Peter Malinauskas MLC, to fund a mother and baby facility in South Australia's corrections system.

When a woman with children is imprisoned – those children suffer.

WLASA believe that imprisonment should be the last resort for women with dependent children, particularly with children under school age.

When there is no other option but imprisonment, then there should be separated residential facilities for mothers and their children.

ACT, NSW, NT QLD, Vic and WA all provide separate and secure residential facilities for young children to live full-time with their mothers who are in prison. In addition, programs are made available to prisoners to support mother-child relationships.

Currently South Australia is the only mainland State without such facilities.

Research has shown that secure attachment in early childhood, particularly from birth to three years, is vital for a child's emotional, physical and mental development. Early separation has traumatic consequences both short and long term. The research has also shown that keeping children and mothers together can aid mothers' rehabilitation¹.

Keeping mothers and babies together is beneficial for the entire community.

WLASA is planning a campaign to see this important change happen in South Australia.

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¹ See for example: http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Mothers-in-custody_DCS-Consultant-Report-December-2012.pdf; <http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/human-rights/women-in-prison-report/women-in-prison-contents/groups-with-special-needs/mothers-of-dependent-children>; and the evidence presented in *R v Soraya Louise Constant – District Court of South Australia unreported- January 2016* by an expert clinical child psychologist.