



Alternative sentencing options for young Indigenous offenders in NSW and the ACT

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs will hear about circle sentencing courts and alternative sentencing options on Thursday, 13 May, as part of its inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system.

The Committee is investigating best practice examples of programs that support the diversion of Indigenous juveniles and young adults from crime and detention and reduce recidivism rates. Circle sentencing operates as Indigenous-specific courts that incorporate respected community elders who provide advice to magistrates. Based on restorative justice principles, circle sentencing allows victims and wider community members to explain the impact of the crime to the offender.

Geoffrey Ferguson, Serene Fernando and Alice Haines will discuss what works and what doesn't work with circle sentencing courts, and also talk about Doonooch Dancers as a diversionary concept. Wayne Applebee and Paul Collis submit that there is a lack of sentencing options available to circle sentencing magistrates, and propose a post-sentencing diversionary program for young Indigenous people in the ACT called Circuit Breaker.

The Hon Bob Debus MP, Committee Chair, said, "Indigenous youth are highly over-represented in juvenile and youth detention centres and prisons. The underlying conditions that contribute to high offending rates need to be addressed, but we also need to look at what happens to young Indigenous offenders when they enter the court system."

Public hearing program:

12.15pm, Thursday 13 May 2010
Committee Room 1R2, Parliament House, Canberra

Mr Geoffrey Ferguson
Ms Serene Fernando
Ms Alice Haines

Mr Wayne Applebee
Mr Paul Collis

To listen to the public hearing on your computer, go to <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au or see the Committee's website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/atsia>