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## MEDIA RELEASE

### The impact of abolishing short prison sentences

Abolishing prison sentences of six months or less could save NSW taxpayers between \$33 million and \$47 million per annum, according to a study released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The Bureau conducted the study in response to a recommendation of the NSW Legislative Council Select Committee on the Increase in Prisoner Population.

The overall effect of the proposed reform on the size of the prisoner population would be modest (about 10%). This is because most people in prison are serving sentences longer than six months.

However the reform would exert a substantial effect on the flow of people into prison. The Bureau estimates that this would fall by 40 per cent, from 150 per week to 90 per week.

A drop of this magnitude would significantly reduce Aboriginal over-representation in prison. Aboriginal people make up just two per cent of the NSW population but constitute about 20 per cent of those in prison in NSW serving sentences of six months or less.

Commenting on the study results the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that the savings estimate of \$33-\$47 million was conservative.

'We were not able to determine the reception costs associated with each new prisoner', he said. 'These costs are likely to be substantial and are in addition to the daily cost of keeping someone in prison'.

According to Dr Weatherburn, the Legislative Council proposal warrants further investigation.

'NSW courts tend to impose short prison sentences much more frequently than their Victorian counterparts', he said. 'The trouble with short sentences is that it is difficult to devise meaningful rehabilitative programs for people who spend less than six months in prison'.

'It is worth investigating whether the \$35-\$47 million we spend per annum on short sentences could be better spent on improvements in policing or other forms of crime control'.

#### Further enquiries:

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