

JUSTICE — PRISONER EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

298. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Corrective Services:

I refer to the research report entitled *Let them work: How criminal justice reform can help address Australia's worker shortage*, published by the Institute of Public Affairs this month, which advocates for the introduction of work-focused community service orders for all nonviolent and non-sexual offenders who are prepared to work full-time.

- (1) Is the minister aware of this research report?
- (2) Is the minister aware that the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics' job vacancies survey found that almost one-third of businesses in WA have vacancies?
- (3) Is the minister aware that the report argues that such work-focused community service orders would help address the current worker shortages, reduce incarceration rates and, consequentially, the state's prison expenditure, and enhance the rehabilitation of nonviolent offenders?
- (4) Will the minister undertake to discuss the report with the Premier and the Attorney General?

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. The following long answer has been provided to me by the Minister for Corrective Services.

(1)–(2) Yes.

- (3) The Department of Justice currently provides the prisoner employment program as part of career and employment services, providing minimum-security prisoners in Western Australia with the opportunity to engage in meaningful and sustainable paid employment, work experience, vocational training and education in the community for up to 12 months prior to release. By participating in the program, prisoners can develop the skills and support networks required for their successful reintegration into the community. PEP aims to enhance employment opportunities for prisoners both pre-release and post-release, assist in prisoners' rehabilitation and reintegration into the community and reduce the risk of recidivism.

As a part of the PEP, employment coordinators are located in prisons to help prisoners secure work experience both pre-release and post-release. The role of the coordinators is to develop and implement a number of employment initiatives for prisoners returning to the community. The employment coordinators engage with local employers and industry to assist with connecting prisoners to labour market skills shortage areas in the community.

The Carey Bindjareb program is a joint venture between the Department of Justice and Carey Training Pty Ltd. It provides a comprehensive educational and mentoring program for Aboriginal men currently engaged in the criminal justice system. The men undertake a traineeship in civil construction and work on a simulated mine site using heavy machinery. Since partnering with Carey in 2019, 91 men have graduated from the 14-week intensive program, attaining industry skills, life skills and the confidence and resilience to fulfil and sustain employment. Of that number, 61 graduates are now in the community. Forty-five, or 73 per cent, of those men were employed in the mining, civil and related industries, or are working through employment recruitment processes with our partners.

- (4) The minister has requested a briefing from the Department of Justice on the report.

The PRESIDENT: I note that pointing out that the answer is long does not necessarily appease standing order 105, but then the question was equally long and elicited a significant amount of information. Both are not helpful for a quick-flow question time.