



Irish Penal Reform Trust
Marco Community Resource Centre
1 Green Street,
Dublin 7, Ireland.

T: +353 1 8741400
E: info@iprt.ie
W: www.iprt.ie

Joint Committee on Public Petitions
and the Ombudsman
Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House,
Dublin 2
D02 XR20

29 February 2024

Ref: JCPP-i-2-24-467

Dear Mr Alino,

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) would like to thank you for consulting with us on Petition No: P00033-21 from Mr Cormac McKay titled; "Call for a Citizens Assembly on the Irish Justice system; Policing, Crime and Rehabilitation".

Established in 1994, IPRT is Ireland's principal independent non-governmental organisation working for systemic penal reform and change. Our vision is a just, humane Ireland where prison is used as a last resort. We advocate for a progressive criminal justice system that prioritises alternatives to prison, upholds human rights, and champions reintegration. We do this through conducting research, campaigning, and changing attitudes.

While we in IPRT are aware that the Citizens Assembly on Drugs Use has now completed its deliberations, we would welcome a future Citizens Assembly to focus on the criminal justice system and its complexities.

IPRT recently marked the tenth [anniversary](#) of the [Report on Penal Reform of 2013](#) by the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality which attracted cross-party consensus to reduce the prison population by taking measures to tackle overcrowding and put in place a more progressive and humane system. Work to implement the five key recommendations of this 2013 report has been haphazard, with progress made regarding its recommendation for parole but little else has been progressed.

Furthermore, despite more recent commitments in the [Final Report of the High Level Task Force to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those who come into contact with the criminal justice sector](#), and further detailed commitments in the [Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024](#), implementation to date of such commitments has been slow.

Patron of IPRT

Michael D. Higgins
President of Ireland

IPRT Board of Directors

Dr Seamus Taylor (*Chair*)
Dr Cormac Behan
Ashling Golden
Dr Lisa Cuthbert

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Noel Moloney
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We are increasingly concerned at the record numbers of people in our prison system, with several prisons exceeding their official maximum capacity on a regular basis. The Chief Inspector of Prisons has [highlighted](#) how this is negatively impacting conditions with multiple people confined to a single-occupancy cell, sleeping on mattresses wedged beside toilets. We also know it has led to prison school closures due to prison staff shortages and even longer waiting lists for mental health and addiction services.

We in IPRT consider it is time to reimagine the criminal justice system and take a step back to evaluate how it currently operates and how it could be reformed to ensure that it is a more efficient, effective and humane system. This would ultimately result in fewer people in prison, more opportunities to prevent people coming into contact with the criminal justice system in the first place and safer communities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Saoirse Brady

Executive Director

Irish Penal Reform Trust

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