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26th June 2026

Mr Anthony Reilly
Queensland Ombudsman and
Inspector of Detention Services
Office of the Qld Ombudsman
GPO Box 3314
Brisbane Qld 4001

By email: inspector@ombudsman.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Reilly (Anthony),

Re: Review of Maximum-Security Units at Arthur Gorrie, Brisbane and Woodford Correctional Centres

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Inspector of Detention Services' Review of Maximum-Security Units (**MSUs**) at Arthur Gorrie, Brisbane and Woodford Correctional Centres (**Review**).

Preliminary consideration: Our background to comment

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (Qld) Limited (ATSILS), is a community-based public benevolent organisation, established to provide professional and culturally competent legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Queensland. The founding organisation was established in 1973. We now have 25 offices strategically located across the State. Our Vision is to be the leader of innovative and professional legal services. Our Mission is to deliver quality legal assistance services, community legal education, and early intervention and prevention initiatives which uphold and advance the legal and human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ATSILS provides legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Queensland. Whilst our primary role is to provide criminal, civil and family

law representation, we are also funded by the Commonwealth to perform a State-wide role in the key areas of Community Legal Education, and Early Intervention and Prevention initiatives (which include related law reform activities and monitoring Indigenous Australian deaths in custody). Our submission is informed by over five decades of legal practise at the coalface of the justice arena and we, therefore, believe we are well placed to provide meaningful comment, not from a theoretical or purely academic perspective, but rather from a platform based upon actual experiences.

Comments in relation to the Review

Difficulties experienced in trying to visit clients detained in MSUs

We have received feedback from our Throughcare officers about difficulties that they have experienced in being able to visit clients in MSUs. In particular, these difficulties relate to the following:

- Throughcare officers being advised that a booking is required as a prerequisite to visiting a client in the MSU;
- Cultural Liaison Officers, who make these bookings, have not been consistently making the bookings leaving Throughcare officers arriving at a facility to visit a client and being advised that they could not visit as there was no booking;
- Cultural Liaison Officers have not been making bookings because they are too busy or, in the observation of frontline staff, find the administrative burden too onerous;
- Throughcare officers are sometimes completely denied access to visit a client, despite repeated attempts to visit, without any reasons provided for the refusal, despite repeated attempts to seek reasons for the refusal.

We offer the following as an example. A Mental Health Throughcare officer spoke of his experience with a client detained at Brisbane Correctional Centre MSU. He advised that whilst he was previously able to visit his client weekly for approximately 4 months towards the end of 2025, he found the whole process difficult. In order for him to be able to visit his client, a booking would need to be made for his visit ahead of time. This was to be undertaken by the Cultural Liaison Officer. He advised that, despite the Cultural Liaison Officer and Supervisors of the MSU being aware that he would be visiting the client weekly, the internal booking was not consistently made for him by the Cultural Liaison Officer and he found himself on many occasions showing up to the facility to visit the client and being told that he had no booking. It would then depend on the flexibility of the Supervisor as to whether the lack of a booking would be overlooked such that he could be given access to visit the client. Sometimes he would be knocked back, and the client would miss out on his regular mental health visit. When

he was allowed to visit the client, he was only ever permitted to do so in an interview room with a clear wall between them. The Mental Health Throughcare officer advised that during the time period that he was visiting the client weekly, the client's mental health significantly improved and that the client looked forward to their 20-minute visits. We note that this particular client had been held in the MSU for approximately three years.

The difficulties that Throughcare officers experience in being able to visit their clients in the MSU is not unique to Brisbane Correctional Centre. A Mental Health Throughcare officer has been flat out refused entry to the MSU in Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre to visit a client that he has been trying to visit for over a year. Despite his repeated attempts to visit the client over this period of time, he was repeatedly blocked from having access to the client. He has repeatedly asked Supervisors/relevant staff as to why he has been denied access. Not only would they refuse to give reasons for the denial of access, they refused to talk about it at all.

Cultural Liaison officers not visiting detainees in the MSU

As part of the feedback that we received from our Throughcare team, we were advised that the current Cultural Liaison Officers do not visit detainees in the MSU. They were particularly concerned about the fact that this has not been happening due to their own difficulties in being able to visit clients, meaning that those detained would have effectively have no visits by any support staff. Whilst they acknowledged that the detainees in the MSU were often challenging cases and could be violent and unpredictable in their behaviour, the isolation that detainees experience in the MSU (which they described to be much worse than being detained in the Detention Unit) has significant impacts on their mental health. Referring back to our earlier example, the positive impact that the weekly visits of our Mental Health Throughcare officer had on the mental health of the client that he was supporting is a powerful demonstration of the immense importance of these visits.

In our view, subject to any legitimate safety considerations, a Mental Health Throughcare officer should be given automatic access to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person detained in any MSU statewide, without the barriers outlined above, in consideration of vulnerability and the impact that being detained in an MSU has on the detainee's mental health.

In the words of one Throughcare officer, "they are very lonely and depressing places to be".

Racial Discrimination

We were advised that some of the Supervisors at the MSU "didn't think much of Aboriginal people" and expressed such directly to Throughcare officers. This was raised, in particular, in relation to Brisbane Correctional Centre.

Access to phone calls/frequency of phone calls

Our legal practitioners and Throughcare staff have raised concerns regarding detainees' access to phone calls/frequency of phone calls whilst being detained in the MSUs. In one matter, a client that was held in the Woodford Correctional Centre MSU was only permitted to make calls twice a week. We have received feedback that a detainee's access to phone calls is sometimes limited based on their behaviour. Whilst we acknowledge behaviour management is in the purview of Corrective Services staff, access to phone calls might be the only way that detainees are given access to support. Taking such away would only impact the mental health of detainees more and this would, counterintuitively, have the potential to create more undesirable behaviours.

We respectfully recommend that, in undertaking its Review, the Inspector investigates whether Correctional Centres are meeting relevant standards for a detainee's access to phone calls, especially given the impacts that being detained in the MSU has on a detainee's mental health.

Thank you for the opportunity to comments in relation to the Review.

Yours faithfully,

Shane Duffy
Chief Executive Officer