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28th January 2026

Inspector of Detention Services
Office of the Queensland Ombudsman
GPO Box 3314
Brisbane QLD 4000

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

Dear Inspector of Detention Services,

Re: Inspection of Woodford Correctional Centre

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the inspection of Woodford Correctional Centre (**WCC**). In this submission, we have raised a number of very serious concerns regarding the treatment of prisoners at WCC including relating to:

- the use of excessive force on prisoners;
- allegations from prisoners of sexual assault perpetrated by inmates with a grossly inadequate response to the same by corrective services officers and other relevant state agencies;
- concerns relating to the sexual assault of prisoners allegedly perpetrated by corrective services officers;
- the use of inappropriate strip searches on prisoners;
- prisoners being subject to racism by corrective services officers;
- the lack of adequate health care for prisoners; and
- the complete disregard for specific dietary requirements of prisoners due to allergies (including where those allergies result in risk of anaphylaxis).

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 on the upcoming inspection of Woodford Correctional Centre

Introductory comments

We wish to formally raise grave and urgent concerns regarding the treatment of prisoners at WCC. These concerns include:

- the use of excessive force on prisoners;
- allegations from prisoners of sexual assault perpetrated by inmates with a grossly inadequate response to the same by corrective services officers and other relevant state agencies;
- concerns relating to the sexual assault of prisoners allegedly perpetrated by corrective services officers;
- the use of inappropriate strip searches on prisoners;
- prisoners being subject to racism by corrective services officers;
- the lack of adequate health care for prisoners; and
- the complete disregard for specific dietary requirements of prisoners due to allergies (including where those allergies result in risk of anaphylaxis).

Below, we have expressed particular comments that we wish to bring to your attention regarding certain concerns raised above. We have then outlined a number of de-identified client examples, which we consider will provide detail to the concerns raised.

Excessive use of force

We have significant concerns regarding the use of excessive force on prisoners detained in WCC, in particular, by a group of 5-6 corrective services officers colloquially known amongst prisoners as the 'goon squad', the 'turtle squad' or 'riot squad'. This group of officers have a known reputation for being heavy handed and using excessive force on prisoners, as has been reported to us by numerous clients. Furthermore, it has been reported to us that this known group of corrective services officers often bait prisoners and then use the response of the prisoner as a justification for the use of excessive force.

Sexual assault and/or inappropriate strip searches

We are also extremely concerned about **allegations from prisoners of sexual assault and/or or inappropriate strip searches** of prisoners by correctional services officers. We are not certain as to whether these allegations relate to the aforementioned group of officers, or other officers. The allegations range from inappropriately spreading the buttocks of prisoners apart, to rape.

Critical to this issue is that it is often impossible for our clients to provide us with names of offending officers as QCS officers, unlike police, **do not have to wear name badges** and, we are advised, do not always provide their names when asked by clients. We have raised this same issue in relation to other correctional facilities.

Lack of adequate healthcare/ medical treatment

We also wish to bring to your attention the **lack of adequate healthcare/medical treatment** provided to clients at WCC.

There are currently two deaths in custody at WCC which are the subject of coronial inquests, both of which will investigate whether the healthcare treatment of the deceased persons was adequate. We represent the family of one of the deceased individuals who passed away after not receiving proper medical care, despite submitting medical request forms. Whilst we are yet to receive the brief of evidence in relation to this matter, we have undertaken some initial investigations. In those investigations, serious allegations were raised about WCC corrective services officers where inmates of the deceased that had asked WCC corrective services officers about what happened to the deceased were allegedly purposefully lied to regarding the deceased's cause of death, in that they were allegedly advised that the death was

caused by an overdose - a claim which is inaccurate, as well as being entirely disrespectful and unprofessional. We further note that, to our knowledge, the prisoners housed in the same unit as our client were not offered any mental health support following his death.

Failure to comply with allergy dietary requirements

We have also received complaints about the WCC not providing clients with their allergy diets, despite being aware that those individuals are anaphylactic to certain foods. This has resulted in some clients having to skip meals and go hungry, which is significant violation of their human rights.

De-identified client examples relating to concerning treatment of prisoners detained in WCC

Outlined below is a number of de-identified client examples relating to the concerns raised in this submission. For the purposes of maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of these clients, we have used randomly generated codes (pseudonyms) for each client.

- Client ABC had a history of childhood sexual abuse which QCS was aware of. Client ABC was sexually assaulted at a correctional centre in Queensland other than WCC. Following this, QCS moved Client ABC to another correctional centre other than WCC in a known sex offender unit which houses very serious offenders. Client ABC was subsequently physically and sexually assaulted in this unit. ATSILS advocated for Client ABC to be moved to WCC due to a family member being held there. Despite the assault being reported to QCS and the QPS, and QCS having knowledge that Client ABC was also the victim of childhood sexual abuse, in a shocking breach of their duty of care, QCS (WCC) placed Client ABC in a cell with a convicted sex offender. ATSILS advocated for him to be moved to a different cell. We also lodged complaints to the Queensland Human Rights Commission, the Crime and Corruption Commission, the Ombudsman and previously have raised this case with the Inspector of Detention Services. We received a great deal of pushback from QCS and QPS in relation to the investigation of the sexual assault.

- Client BKC, who was detained at WCC, was bleeding from his bowels and in significant pain. Client BKC had been informed by medical staff operating out of WCC (Queensland Health) that he needed to undergo a colonoscopy within 3 months, however, 9 months had elapsed and he still had not received one. Instead, Client BKC was merely prescribed laxatives at WCC. Client BKC was also suffering

from chest pains, and his family was so concerned about him that they called an ambulance to attend WCC. The ambulance contacted WCC twice that night and each time, the prison informed them that they were not required. ATSILS wrote to the General Manager, contacted the Office of the Health Ombudsman and tried to find a General Practitioner in the community who might be able to attend the prison to assess him. Despite our efforts, Client BKC was not provided with the necessary medical care whilst detained in WCC. We were ultimately able to facilitate his release on parole so that he could obtain medical care in the community.

- Client JKL was diagnosed with cancer. ATSILS' Throughcare officer assigned to assist Client JKL raised concerns regarding a delay in Client JKL's diagnosis and the apparent mismanagement of Client JKL's treatment. The ATSILS lawyer representing Client JKL scheduled a video conference with Client JKL earlier this year, which was cancelled on the day, with WCC advising that Client JKL was on 'escort'. ATSILS subsequently ascertained that Client JKL was, in fact, in hospital. Our Throughcare officer attempted to visit Client JKL; however, WCC was not forthcoming as to Client JKL's location and ultimately prevented our Throughcare officer from seeing him. ATSILS Throughcare officer then subsequently attended WCC to try and see Client JKL, but was told by WCC that they did not have enough staff in that unit, so he would not be able to see him. At the time of writing, the ATSILS lawyer representing Client JKL scheduled another video conference (noting WCC had cancelled the earlier one) with the hopes to contact him. That date has not transpired yet, however, it remains to be seen as to whether QCS will allow this to occur or create another obstacle to prevent contact from occurring.

- Client JMZ reported that he has not been receiving his required medication and that he is repeatedly not being given his proper allergy diet. Of serious concern is that WCC has been providing him with food that they know Client JMZ is anaphylactic to. Client JMZ made complaints to the General Manager and Official Visitor.

- Client PQR was not given his allergy diet, despite WCC being aware of his allergies and him making several complaints.

- Client QWE reported that he was assaulted by approximately six WCC correctional officers. He alleged that one officer deliberately attempted to force his knee out of its socket and, while doing so, stated to another officer words to the effect of, "this is how easy it is to put him in pain." During the course of the alleged assault, the same officer is said to have touched Client QWE inappropriately by forcibly

pulling his buttocks apart. Client QWE further reported that, while held in the Detention Unit, he was taunted by an officer who repeatedly and deliberately turned the lights on and off. Client QWE also alleges that there is a group of officers who routinely bait prisoners and deliberately incite confrontations in order to create a pretext for the use of excessive force.

- Client RHQ, who is transgender, reported that she was assaulted by a correctional officer who allegedly slammed a door on her with such force that she fell backwards and injured her shoulder. Client RHQ further reported that, after disclosing to her counsellor that she is transgender, she was taken to the Detention Unit, strip searched and held in the Detention Unit for a period of two days. There was some concern about the level of dignity and privacy afforded to Client RHQ when QCS conducted the strip search given her transgender status. Client RHQ also stated that she witnessed correctional officers forcibly remove another prisoner from the top bunk of the prisoner's cell by pulling him by the hair and subsequently assaulting him. Client RHQ reported that the prisoner had been lying on his bed crying and did not come to the cell door when instructed to do so, which she believes prompted the officers' actions. In addition, Client RHQ stated that she had witnessed a female WCC correctional officer openly using racial slurs and openly stating her hatred toward Aboriginal people.

- Client RLN advised our Throughcare officer that there is a group of officers at WCC dragging prisoners out of bed at night and raping them in the showers. This has been reported to the Ombudsman.

- Client SPR reported that WCC correctional officers entered his unit and selected him and one other male prisoner. Client SPR advised that they were taken to their respective cells "under suspicion" and directed to strip, bend over, spread their legs, and cough. Client SPR further recalled officers making statements to the effect of, "if we find anything we will hurt you", which he understood as a threat of physical harm.

- Client WLT reported that inmates are being searched and guards are touching them inappropriately.

We have also heard anecdotally that two young boys who were transferred to WCC confessed to a respected member of the local community that they had been raped by corrective services officers soon after being transferred to WCC. We came to know, subsequently, that certain WCC corrective services officers had been stood

down for use of excessive force. It is unclear whether this related to the sexual assault allegations or another incident.

The matters outlined in this submission raise profound concerns about the safety, dignity and human rights of people detained at WCC and expose egregious breaches of relevant domestic law including the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld), relevant professional standards and Australia's international human rights obligations. Given the seriousness of these allegations and the vulnerability of the affected cohort, we respectfully request the Inspector's immediate attention and consideration of these matters.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the upcoming inspection of Woodford Correctional Centre.

Yours faithfully,

Shane Duffy
Chief Executive Officer