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30th July 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 Anthony,

Re: Inspection of Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the current Inspector of Detention Services inspection of Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (**BWCC**) (the **Inspection**). In this submission, we have outlined some concerns regarding the conditions and/or treatment of women detained at BWCC based on input received from our frontline staff who visit and provide support services at BWCC. These concerns relate to: understaffing at the centre and the flow on effects of this; the provision of prescription medication; significant delays being experienced by women in custody seeking approval for phone numbers on their approved phone contact list; significant barriers and delays in women being able to have their children or children that they care for visit them at BWCC; an unacceptable lack of trauma-informed and culturally safe practice when Child Safety calls through to the centre to advise a woman that they are removing her child/ren from her care; and no clear and accessible schedule on what rehabilitation programs are available at the centre.

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

Understaffing

We are concerned about significant understaffing at BWCC which appears to contribute to a workplace environment where corrective services officers are often observed to be frustrated and stressed - with that frustration and stress at times being directed towards women in custody and support staff who attend the centre to provide services to women detained there. Feedback obtained from our frontline staff revealed that corrective services officers at BWCC have often been observed to be rude, dismissive or disrespectful in their interactions, and that the treatment of women by corrective services officers was viewed to be unfair, due to staff being "under the pump".

There have been times where our Mental Health Throughcare officer has attended the centre to provide support services to clients and not been able to see anyone due to understaffing. This is despite their following protocol and booking visits ahead of time to visit those clients. There have been occasions where up to 7 separate support organisations including our Mental Health Throughcare staff have attended the centre, with some individuals driving over an hour to be there, only to be told that they could not see any clients.

In addition, the centre has advised that for clients to be able to see the Mental Health Throughcare officer, they would need go through the prison visits protocol. On one occasion, our Mental Health Throughcare officer was attending BWCC to visit 2 clients: one with paranoid schizophrenia and one in a wheelchair. Our Mental Health Throughcare officer's visits are usually approximately 5 to 10 minutes in duration. In order for these clients to be able to see her, they were each subjected to a physical search, asked to take out their hair and shake it out and walk through a body scanner. For the client in the wheelchair, her wheelchair was also searched. The client with paranoid schizophrenia was so heightened by this process that the entire time that our Mental Health Throughcare Officer was able to see her was taken up by her attempting to de-escalating the client. This is entirely counterproductive to her role, which is to provide mental health support services to her clients.

Medication

There appear to be a number of issues relating to the provision of and/or barriers to the provision of prescription medication for women in custody at BWCC.

We offer the following example: A client who was on prescribed medications when previously in custody at BWCC was released and returned to custody. Despite being approved for those prescription medications when she was previously in custody, and the fact that she has official diagnoses connected with those prescribed medications, she has been at BWCC for several weeks without her prescribed medications. Being without those prescription medications has impacted upon her behaviour at the centre and her mental health. Such can result in a punitive response to her, for something that is entirely outside of her control.

Additionally, when a client is released from custody, any scripts for prescription medications that were issued to her whilst she was in custody do not carry forth into community. In order for continuity of medication, the client would need to see a doctor upon release. This does not always occur. Whilst we are aware that Metro North Health has a program in which they are able to provide individuals exiting custody with a medical discharge summary and up to a 7-day supply of essential prescription medication to prevent gaps in treatment during their transition back into the community, this is not consistently occurring.

Approved telephone contact

Our Throughcare officers have advised that it is currently taking approximately six to eight weeks for women in custody at BWCC to obtain approval of phone numbers for their approved call list. This is a significantly long period of time for a person entering

custody to be without phone communication to their loved ones. Our staff have observed this having negative impacts on their clients' mental health.

Approval visits for children

Significant delays are also being experienced by women who have sought approval for their children to visit them.

One of our clients waited four months for the centre to issue approval for her children to visit her. Another client was the informal kinship carer of twin children. The centre required her to complete a Statutory Declaration stating that she was the kinship carer of the children. She then needed to wait for a Justice of the Peace to be in attendance at reception to have the document witnessed. The Justice of Peace is only there intermittently and would only witness documents if they had the time and were willing to do so. Delays in mother or carers being able to see their children or children that they care for causes hardship not only to the mother in custody, but also to the children. It can significantly impact the mother/carer's mental health.

Child Safety telephone calls

One of our frontline staff witnessed a Corrective Services Officer take a client, who was a young pregnant woman, into an interview room at the centre. Once they had been in the room for a time, the young woman came out of the interview room and was clearly very emotionally dysregulated and unstable. What had transpired was that Child Safety had called through to BWCC to speak with the young woman to advise her that they would be opening a case to have her child removed from her care. The young woman had no support person with her in receiving that call and once she left the interview room highly dysregulated, it caused a significant amount of upset amongst the whole yard once others came to know the reason for her dysregulation. Our Throughcare staff advised that this impacted other mothers that have had their child or children removed. It is unfathomable as to how this took place without sufficient planning for, at minimum, a support person to be with her. Given Child Safety would plan ahead to make this call, i.e., it is not done on a whim, there must be a far safer process in delivering such information to a mother, or mother-to-be in custody. Whilst we appreciate that Child Safety is a separate government department subject to their own legislation, procedures and practices, in our view, there is no reason why Child Safety could not work with the staff at BWCC to ensure that for phone calls that involve advising a mother or mother-to-be that Child Safety intend to remove their child/ren from them, staff at BWCC facilitate a support person to be with the mother or mother-to-be when the call comes through. In this situation,

our staff member was physically at the centre at the time and could have provided this support had she been advised that support was needed.

Rehabilitation programs

There remains no clear and accessible schedule with information relating to what rehabilitation programs are available at the centre. This makes registration very difficult. As participation in rehabilitation programs are a critical part of time in custody and directly impact the likelihood of securing parole, it is imperative that this be addressed. We are aware that this is a widespread issue at various correctional centres, female and male.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the Inspection.

Yours faithfully,

Shane Duffy
Chief Executive Officer