



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25](#))

Members:

**MS C BARRY (Chair)
MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS (Deputy Chair)
MR S RATTENBURY**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2025

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K de Kleuver (Ph: 6207 0524)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

ACT Official Visitors	136
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.54 am

Appearances:

ACT Official Visitors

Doube, Ms Clare, Official Visitor for Corrections and member of Official Visitors Board

Muir, Mr Peter, Chair, Official Visitors Board

Webster, Ms Kim, Official Visitor for Disability

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for its inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2024-2025. The committee will today hear from Official Visitors in relation to their corrections responsibilities.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contributions they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. Therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. As such, the giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and web-streamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome witnesses from Official Visitors. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. My first question is around the inadequate focus on rehabilitation and reintegration at the AMC. Earlier this week, we heard from the minister, who indicated that there is no baseline assessment of the literacy and numeracy skills of people in the AMC. That raises the question of how people can participate in programs if they do not have basic reading and writing skills. I want to get your views on that. We also heard that programs are being offered, but inmates do not register for the programs. I have also heard from people who have exited the AMC that the programs that are offered are inadequate for the skills that they already bring to the AMC, and often that is the reason they do not engage. I want to hear your views on that and what you think we can do to actually improve outcomes.

Ms Doube: I think there are issues with the kinds of programs on offer and the ability to access them. It can be broken down into multiple reasons. I hear from detainees who say that programs do not meet their needs or are not delivered in a way that promotes engagement, so there might be a lack of willingness to engage. We also hear about detainees who may go to SAB for a parole hearing and only at that point realise that there is a program that they may have been eligible for or it may have been useful for them to attend. When there is a shortage of staff, the education area may be closed. Senior staff do everything they can to juggle staff around and make sure that it is open,

but we know of many occasions when courses—criminogenic programs, but also courses in, say, construction, or whatever it is—do not run because there are no staff to run them.

There are waiting lists for some programs, so it may take some time until someone is able to access them. When there are only a couple of women, there may be considerable delays or a program may not run at all. Absolutely, we have myriad concerns that not enough people access the criminogenic programs and a range of other activities and education that we hope would have an effect on their rehabilitation, and then we would hopefully not see them again at the AMC down the track.

THE CHAIR: You have mentioned a flurry of issues. In terms of women, what programs are being offered? I hear that there are little to none. Are you aware of the programs that are being offered to women?

Ms Doube: We certainly know of some of the programs that are being run. It varies, depending on their availability and the women that are there. The directorate would probably be able to give you a comprehensive list. I know more anecdotally, when someone has mentioned that they are in a program or something like that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I go to page 17, regarding the training programs and activities. It is noted that an inadequate number has been on offer, which is in contrast to the annual report of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, which lists five pages of available programs and says there were 504 completions of the related programs, which is more than the average total at the AMC. Can you provide insight into the different perspective of AMC management of detainees? For instance, is it difficult for detainees to identify what is available, so that some detainees think there are not many courses available? Are most completions of very short courses? Are there other challenges that you have observed that fill out the contrast in the reporting?

Ms Doube: I guess it is a bit linked to some of what I was saying about detainees saying that what is on offer would not be things that they see as most useful for their direction in life. Courses are cancelled, often at short notice. So, while there may be a long list of things that would be available at some point, that does not mean that they are necessarily being run at the time. While some are certainly being run, others are cancelled. It is a complex place. For instance, mainstream and protected detainees are not able to be mixed, so something might be on offer for one subset of the prison population but is not available to others. There is a range of those sorts of reasons.

MR RATTENBURY: I want to ask about accessing the right to vote in the AMC. Official Visitors have raised concerns about this. Could you elaborate on the barriers that detainees face? We asked Corrective Services about this last week and they made a few comments, so I would be pleased to hear a bit of detail about what you think the issues are.

Ms Doube: Sure. I was not present at that time, but I did ask one of my colleagues—the Official Visitor who was there that day. I am just passing on the information he shared. When he attended on the day that polling occurred, he went to a number of

units. Some detainees were aware of what they needed to do to vote, but others were completely unaware. In some units, that was able to be rectified at the time so that they could vote. In other units, it was not rectified, so there were individuals who did not vote. When he asked about how communication was done, he was told it was by email. While all detainees have an email address, there are serious limitations. For some there are literacy issues. The aged population may be less comfortable with that. Some individuals are less comfortable with computers. There is also the physical access to computers. There is a very limited number of computers and a lot of detainees do not have ready access to computers. The individuals that my colleague spoke to said they were not aware of what they should do in order to vote, because it had only been communicated by email.

MR RATTENBURY: Do you have any indication of how many detainees were not able to vote?

Ms Doube: We cannot really tell that because he did not go to every unit to ask. At each of the units that he went to that day, some individuals were aware and were voting if they were able to, but there were also some that were unable to. We would not be able to give a definitive figure across the board, but it was certainly the case that, within the units that he visited, there were some who were unable to vote.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. What advice do you have to ensure that these problems are overcome? What improvements would you most recommend for the next bout of voting in a couple of years?

Ms Doube: I think that communication has to happen in multiple ways. Absolutely, email is an important way, but there should also be notices in units. There should be more use of the delegates group, peer mentors and other groups where detainees can share that information or are tasked with sharing that information with others in the unit. Officers could also call out the information. There need to be multiple avenues for voting, but also for other important messages that need to get out. We cannot rely on just one avenue, and it cannot just be a written way of doing so; we need to make sure that important bits of information have to be shared verbally as well.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. I am not sure who this next question goes to. In the annual report, page 2 says that the board identified systemic issues. On one level, it is quite diplomatic language, but on another level it is frankly brutal. There is commentary around longstanding issues not being addressed by agencies and ministers. It says:

These issues continue to be reported with minimal progress and longstanding Official Visitors are questioning the degree to which directorates and operational Ministers are acting on issues raised.

This is an attempt at being polite, but it is also pretty forthright. From your perspective, why are you not getting progress on these systemic issues?

Ms Doube: Perhaps I can speak to the corrections perspective, but Peter may also want to comment more broadly on the scheme. In terms of the process that the Minister for Corrections has put in place, which we really welcome, when we provide our written quarterly report to her, there is now a report-back mechanism of the sorts of actions that

have been taken around some of the recommendations, which we really welcome as a way to have that on record. There are certainly some areas where we see progress, but there are still multiple areas that are ongoing sources of frustration for us. I totally acknowledge that the AMC is a complex place and many of the issues that are being raised do not have simple fixes. However, I would like to see further progress.

I could give one example of what I would see as a simple issue: name tags for officers. It is a part of an officer's uniform. Very few officers wear name tags. The reason that is important is that, quite often, a detainee will raise with me that officer X used inappropriate language, and when I ask who, they will say, "Oh, the tall guy." There is no way of identifying who that was and we cannot then follow up in any meaningful way. That is one example of something that I think is simple and can be resolved, but it still continues. Many of the other issues are probably a lot more complex and require further resources and other changes, so I understand they may take a longer time to be rolled out. That is from a corrections perspective, but there might be some further comments in terms of that overall comment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Even name tags might not suffice if literacy is an issue.

Ms Doube: Yes, although a detainee could ask someone who could check. There could be some ways around that. It would certainly help.

Ms Webster: One of the systemic issues that has been raised is with regard to the request for a death review panel, which was a recommendation of the royal commission. This was first raised by the Official Visitors to the minister in late 2020. While we understand the government has accepted this principle in kind, we have not actually seen any progress at all.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you.

Mr Muir: There are a number of ways in which I would like to answer this. Firstly, I will start with corrections. Across the scheme, corrections have accounted for something like 80 per cent of all complaints to the scheme and it has done so for a very long time. In my time as chair of the board and from past annual reports, this theme continues. I think it was last year—Ms Doube may correct me—that we asked the Official Visitor for Corrections to make a very rough estimate of the complexity of these complaints. Something like 60 per cent of them were fairly mundane issues that could and should have been resolved within the day-to-day operations of the centre. These issues burn a lot of time with Official Visitors.

If I zoom out, as a board we see these reports come through. We map when issues were raised and in which quarterly report they were. From a board perspective, that makes concerning reading, because you can look back three or four years and see the same issues coming back time and time again. When we get to things like asking for a review of the scheme, it is a question of: why is the scheme here? If we are continuing to raise the same issues with ministers and directorates year in and year out and the same issues are being reported in quarterly reports to ministers, it raises questions about the *raison d'être* of the scheme.

We believe strongly in the scheme and Official Visitors take their role seriously. We

are unclear about where it is breaking down. Earlier this year, there was talk about trying to introduce a more effective feedback loop from ministers and directorates. Some of that occurs informally. The Official Visitors may correct me on this, but, when I review quarterly reports, I am not always seeing the resolution to reports. One of the very practical things would be to start to record outcomes formally—the issues that have been raised and what the outcomes were. We continue to raise issues around Housing ACT. They continue to permeate reports, whether it is about maintenance, the quality of stock offered to people, visitable places or access to housing as an exit strategy, with regard to corrections, mental health, children and young people. These issues continue to be raised.

We would welcome a feedback loop. We have been able to progress it with the minister's staff at this stage. If we could actually see some documented feedback on the concerns that have been raised, that would be one practical thing that could progress some of these issues. It comes in some forms, but it is not systemic.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a quick follow-up question in relation to the question that Mr Rattenbury raised around voting. How do detainees know who to vote for? What information is provided?

Ms Doube: I am not sure what information is available. Perhaps that would be a better question for the Electoral Commission or the directorate.

THE CHAIR: It is interesting. Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Regarding computer access, have tablets been introduced into the AMC or are they being introduced?

Ms Doube: We hope they will be introduced. When I started in the role two years ago, I was told that they were coming in about six months. The most recent timeframe I have been given is about a year to two from now.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: That would depend on how the Wi-Fi is set up and the nature of the internet access. In one to two years it might make some difference. Do you understand whether that will mean there will be one for each cell or one for each inmate? How does that—

Ms Doube: The plan at this stage is that there would be a tablet for every detainee. That would make a huge difference in terms of accessibility to email, but it would also make massive difference in being able to make calls home at times—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: A sense of connectedness.

Ms Doube: and opportunities for education and programs. It would open up a whole new world, but it is still some time away.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you very much.

MR EMERSON: I want to follow up on evidence earlier in the year about health care in the AMC. Ms Doube, you indicated that there were issues with medication timing. The response I received to a question that was taken on notice after that indicated that a later medication round was anticipated to commence by April 2025. Has that happened?

Ms Doube: Yes, it has. We are really pleased to see that there is now a late afternoon round, which is certainly an improvement for sleeping tablets and the kinds of things that need to be given at night.

MR EMERSON: That is great. Well done. Another issue that was raised was about a lack of clarity among detainees about their treatment and medication, and sometimes staff engaged with them in a disrespectful manner. I was told earlier in the year that the Justice Health Service met with the New South Wales Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health, and the Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Lived Experience director to undertake a prisoner satisfaction survey and the aim is to have this out toward the end of 2025. Are you able to provide an update on where that might be up to? Are you across that at all?

Ms Doube: I am not able to provide an update around that survey, but, on your point around attitude and communication, I would note that, over the last six months or so, we have received far fewer complaints around that. I am aware that Justice Health has been doing some work around putting greater emphasis around that kind of communication. Complaints are far less common than they were.

MR EMERSON: That is good to hear. Another of the issues was access to health care. In the response, I was told that, as we know, no health care services are provided within court cells. The ACT government has identified this as a gap. Do you know if anything is being done to address that gap?

Ms Doube: I do not think anything has been done. At the moment, when individuals are in the court cells and are waiting for court, there are no health services. If an incident happens, obviously staff have first-aid certificates and are able to respond immediately, and they will call an ambulance, but there is no nurse on site, like there is at the AMC.

MR EMERSON: Dental services are back to normal. That is what I was told in the response. They are available three days a week—something like that.

Ms Doube: I am not sure of the exact—

MR EMERSON: Specifically at the AMC.

Ms Doube: number of times a week that a dentist is on site at the AMC. We still have issues raised with us around dental care and the time it takes. When I raised it recently—an individual raised dental pain with me on a number of days in a row—I was told that, in terms of triage processes and an urgent appointment, it would take about four weeks until someone is seen, so they may be in dental pain for four weeks.

MR EMERSON: That is not ideal. Two out of four—I call them wins for the Official Visitors. There are a couple of improvements and still some issues to work on. Thank

you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. I thank witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard staff for their support. Official Visitors, thank you very much for the work you continue to do. It is really important work.

The committee adjourned at 10.19 am