TERRY MILLS
OPPOSITION LEADER
MEDIA RELEASE

November 13th, 2009

FAILED POLICIES SHOULD BE CHANGED

The poor-taste comments made by a Territory Magistrate have highlighted the serious shortfalls within the Labor Government’s sentencing regime.

Opposition Leader Terry Mills said the 12-month sentence handed to a man who kicked his girlfriend in the face while in the back of a paddy van does not appear tough enough given the defendant’s criminal history.

But the case also highlights the Henderson Government’s failure to provide proper rehabilitation for serial drunks who commit acts of violence while intoxicated.

According to Glen Dooley from the North Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency, the defendant had been in jail four times for assault before yesterday’s conviction – and never undergone rehabilitation.

“Finally, after 5 prison sentences for assault, this man will finally get alcohol rehabilitation,” Mr Mills said.

“His repeated acts of violence are inexcusable and it could be argued that a four-month sentence before he undergoes mandatory rehabilitation is too short – but the Government’s failure to provide adequate rehabilitation services highlights a serious policy failure.

“So too does the Government’s policy that prisoners serving a sentence of less than 6 months are not able to do mandatory rehabilitation.

“The Corrections system is so called because while there is a punishment component – there must also be a focus on correcting criminal behaviour through rehabilitation.

“In Budget Estimates Committee hearings this year, Corrections Minister Gerry McCarthy revealed just 10% of the Territory’s 1100 inmates were offered alcohol programs last year.

“As Glen Dooley said on radio today, the criminal justice system is failing victims in part because of:

...inexperienced police, courts without proper options and a corrections service that seems to be funded to lock people up and not attempt rehabilitation…

“The Henderson Government has been happy to let the Alcohol Courts limp on without repeat drunks being ordered to undergo mandatory rehabilitation – despite an embarrassingly low 317 referrals between July 2006 and April 2009.
Mr Mills said that under a Country Liberals Government anybody placed in protective custody three times over a six-month period will be declared an habitual drunk and issued with a control order that will require them to undergo alcohol rehabilitation.

Any breaches of the control order would trigger an automatic prison sentence where the offender would receive rehabilitation as well as medical treatment, training, counselling and other appropriate guidance, both inside and out of prison.

"Labor has failed completely to get serious on alcohol and the issues surrounding alcohol," Mr Mills said.

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594