

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2.00 PM ON 20 MAY 2025

Access to chaplaincy and faith services

The Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, has today released a report examining people in custody's well-established right to freely practice their chosen religious and spiritual beliefs.

In Western Australia, chaplaincy and faith services are delivered to people in custody in public prisons via a departmental contract with the Council of Churches Western Australia Inc. (CCWA). CCWA also holds a second contract with Serco to deliver similar services at Western Australia's only private prison, Acacia. Together both contracts are worth more than \$13 million over their lifetime.

The review found prison staff and people in custody had a high regard for those delivering chaplaincy and pastoral care services through the contracts. However, concerns about access were often raised from people of non-Christian faith backgrounds. Mr Ryan noted:

Under the current contracts and departmental policies, we found people in custody who weren't Christian experienced difficulties engaging with religious leaders and practitioners from their faith group. Some also faced challenges practicing their faith, unable to obtain necessary resources or engage in important religious celebrations. There were also consistent requests for culturally and religiously diverse chaplains.

Similarly, most non-Christian faith providers told us they often could not access prisons or prisoners to provide timely support. This was compounded by opaque processes and a lack of essential supports to meet prisoner requests.

The review also found contract monitoring arrangements fell short of the prescribed requirements within each contract. The review details these various requirements, acknowledging many are onerous. However, Mr Ryan also explained such expectations were agreed to by all parties.

Manual and time-consuming processes, insufficient training for the required reporting, and resourcing constraints all contributed to the issues, errors, and oversights we found when examining the governance arrangements of these contracts. However, the Department of Justice, Serco and CCWA each accepted these obligations when establishing the two contracts. As both contracts are up for renewal soon, with the Department's imminent, five of our six recommendations seek to address these governance issues and inform the upcoming tendering and negotiation phases.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 2.00 pm on 20 May 2025 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).