Teachers should not face jail for reporting risks to children in detention

Teachers and other professionals working in detention centres must be free to report suspicions of abuse of children without the threat of jail, the AEU said today.

The Abbott Government’s draconian Border Force Act takes effect from today (July 1) and provides criminal penalties, including jail terms of up to two years, for employees who make public details of conditions in detention centres.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said it was unconscionable to threaten teachers with jail for making public their concerns regarding conditions inside detention centres in an effort to prevent long-term damage to young children.

"Teachers working in detention centres must retain their ability as professionals to speak out on behalf of their students, and to draw attention to issues which can damage students’ long-term health and well-being.

"They must be able to tell the truth about what is happening to protect vulnerable children whose welfare must take priority over the Government’s desire to maintain the secrecy of its detention regime.

"Teachers have a legal duty to report suspected child abuse, and may face penalties for not doing so, yet this Government wants them to leave their ethical and legal responsibilities behind when they enter detention centres.

"The AEU’s position is that no children should be in detention centres, they should be integrated into the community and receive an education.

"If children are held in detention, they must be able to exercise their right to an education from qualified teachers.

The Human Rights Commissioner’s report "The Forgotten Children" detailed the shocking treatment of children in Australian detention centres and the long-term damage it is doing to them, including mental illness, trauma and other harm.

"Among the many serious issues raised is the lack of education for many of these children. Many have been denied education for months on end, or accompanied to school by guards.

"All children have the right to an education in the community, and that this can give some protection from the long-term effects of detention."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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