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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary

On behalf of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) Limited, I welcome the opportunity to make comment to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee about the issue of Value of a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia.

The purpose of this submission is to draw the Committee's attention to evidence about housing and homelessness that address the following terms of reference:

> (b) the economic and social costs of imprisonment;
> (c) the over-representation of disadvantaged groups within Australian prisons, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people experiencing mental ill-health, cognitive disability and hearing loss; and
> (d) the cost, availability and effectiveness of alternatives to imprisonment, including prevention, early intervention, diversionary and rehabilitation measures.

About AHURI

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is a national, not-for-profit organisation that funds and conducts high-quality research into housing and urban issues. It aims to inform the policy making of governments, industry and the community sector and to stimulate debate on these issues in the broader community.

Established in 2000, AHURI has created an extensive evidence-base on a wide range of housing policy issues. These include all aspects of the Australian housing system: homelessness, Indigenous housing, public housing, the private rental market, and home ownership. This research is not just about housing per se, but about the foundational role of housing in securing positive economic and social outcomes.

Implications of housing on justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice

The available research shows that the provision of affordable and appropriate housing is central to prevention and early intervention strategies that inform a justice reinvestment approach. This is borne out in the extensive evidence-base developed by AHURI through the National Housing Research Program over the past decade. A list of AHURI research of direct interest for the Committee is attached.

For example, earlier work by Baldry (AHURI Project 70176) reports how drug use, unsatisfactory housing arrangements, and huge difficulties negotiating complex bureaucratic procedures for public housing are common issues cited by the ex-prisoners in the study. In some instances, a period in prison, especially a short period, far from rehabilitating an offender leads to a worse social context post-release than prior to imprisonment. In respect to housing outcomes, the policy of imprisonment for short sentences for petty crime seriously destabilised at least half of those imprisoned (at the time of the study) and resulted in re-offending and re-incarceration (see AHURI Project 70068).

AHURI research on the cost offsets to government of homelessness shows that homelessness imposes a demonstrable economic cost to the justice system. One current AHURI project is contrasting the cost of homelessness with the net cost of homelessness programs (AHURI Project 82014). This study is assessing the whole of government cost burden of homelessness beyond health and justice to encompass child protection and employment services**.** It builds on an earlier study on the costs of homelessness to government (AHURI Project 80306) which found that addressing homelessness is cost effective. This study examined the whole of government costs associated with homelessness, comparing the cost of providing homelessness services against the cost burden of homelessness on the justice and health systems. Homeless people with complex needs impose a greater cost burden on support services compared to clients in stable, secure housing with similar needs. Further research indicates that homelessness programs are cost-effective as they produce positive outcomes for clients. For example, those at-risk of becoming homeless when they lack support will overwhelmingly sustain their tenancies with support.

Unfortunately, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other disadvantaged groups remain over-represented in the justice system and prison. This is also the case for homelessness specialist services. For instance, the Indigenous understanding of homelessness, and response to housing need, is shaped by kinship obligations which are deeply embedded in the structure of Indigenous society. Those without housing will approach kinfolk for shelter first, and will usually be given a place to stay. This can conceal the rate of secondary homelessness among Indigenous people and result in permanent overcrowding (AHURI Project 80368).

I look forward to the outcome of the deliberations of the Committee on a justice reinvestment approach and welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the matters in this letter with Committee members.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Winter
Executive Director

The following table provides a summary and web-link to those AHURI reports of direct relevance to the Committee's terms of reference.

AHURI Report	Summary
AHURI Project 70176:	This research sampled approximately 140-150 male and female prisoners from Victoria and New South Wales. Subjects were interviewed before leaving prison regarding their planned housing arrangements and a number of other social factors. Only a minority of people leaving New South Wales prisons have support which enables them to improve their welfare after their release. Drug use, unsatisfactory housing arrangements, and huge difficulties negotiating complex bureaucratic procedures for public housing are common issues cited by the participants in the study.
AHURI Project 70068: Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration for ex-prisoners?	The research project set out to explore connections between accommodation and allied social matters, and ex-prisoners' social experiences and social integration post-release. A period in prison, especially a short period, far from rehabilitating an offender leads to a worse social context post-release than prior to imprisonment for many. As far as housing is concerned, the policy of imprisonment for short sentences for petty crime seriously destabilises at least half of those imprisoned and results in re-offending and re-incarceration.
AHURI Project 82014: The cost of homelessness and the net cost of homelessness programs: a national study	This project is exploring the effect homelessness programs have on the potential to yield substantial cost savings particularly in health and justice service areas and on the use of social welfare services.
AHURI Project 80368: Indigenous homelessness: place, house and home	The research involved an ethnographic study of Indigenous homelessness WA. The research found that the Indigenous understanding of homelessness, and response to housing need, is shaped by kinship obligations which are deeply embedded in the structure of Indigenous society. Those without housing will approach kinfolk for shelter first, and will usually be given a place to stay. This can conceal the rate of secondary homelessness among Indigenous people and result in permanent overcrowding. It is important to recognise that this is distinct from the cultural practice of visiting kinfolk, which is an important institution

	amongst Indigenous extended families and may result in temporary overcrowding. Practitioners and homeless people agreed that overcrowding acts as both a hedge against primary homelessness and a force that can result in household breakdown and eviction, especially in 'drinking households'. A managed overcrowding approach which recognises the high rate of secondary homelessness in the Indigenous community and assists households to maintain their housing may prove an effective approach to the development of new policy addressing Indigenous homelessness.