



# PSA Submission

On the Corrections  
Amendment Bill

March 2024

## About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in Aotearoa New Zealand with over 95,000 members. We are a democratic organisation, representing members in the public service, the wider state sector (the district health boards, crown research institutes and other crown entities), state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services, and community sectors.

The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative, and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913. People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

The PSA is an affiliate of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU).

The PSA is the largest union within the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa; representing more than 4200 PSA members; including psychologists, probation officers, case managers, programme facilitators, reintegration co-ordinators, corrections officers, instructors, social workers, counsellors, education tutors, employment and training consultants, bail support officers, operations advisors, policy analysts, administration staff, resident supervisors, executive officers, practise leaders, service managers, security advisors, pou arahi, senior advisors, learning and development, hospital guards, community work supervisors and many more positions. Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa is a large core public service agency, with approximately 10,000 staff at any one time, operating the more than 150 Community Corrections sites, 18 prisons and multiple auxiliary functions such as Electronic Monitoring and Residences.

## This Submission

This submission has been developed by the PSA delegates from Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa. There are more than 300 PSA delegates within Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa, located in prisons, community corrections sites, national office, regional offices and the beyond.

We have also included comments from PSA members within Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa; please note that the cursive text are quotes from PSA members these delegates support. Each quote comes from a different member; these are towards the end of this submission. People in our care (PIOC) refers to those under the management of Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa, be they in custody or community.

## Our PSA Values

### **Solidarity - Kotahitanga**

We champion members' interests with a strong effective voice. We stand together, supporting and empowering members, individually and collectively.

### **Social justice - Pāpori Ture Tika**

We take a stand for decent treatment and justice. We embrace diversity and challenge inequality.

### **Integrity and respect - Te Pono me te Whakaute**

Our actions are characterised by professionalism, integrity, and respect.

### **Solution focused - Otinga Arotahi**

We are a progressive and constructive union, constantly seeking solutions that improve members' working lives.

### **Democratic - Tā te Nuinga e Whakatau ai**

We encourage participation from members. We aim to be transparent, accessible, and inclusive in the way we work.

## PSA Position

The proposed legislation is directly relevant to PSA members in Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa; whose job it will be to provide this extension of rehabilitation support services being proposed to those on remand.

Any extension of existing services needs to urgently address current workforce shortages, given the current inability by Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa to service the rehabilitation needs of those who have been convicted and sentenced.

PSA members are supportive of improving services for the almost 5,000 people in Aotearoa/New Zealand on remand. This is an astounding figure that deserves its own submission; as in, how exceptional a 45% remand population is internationally and how we have reached this disastrous reality.

The rationale for the extension of rehabilitation towards the thousands on remand is not disputed, but members within Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa feel that this amendment is attempting to put a band aid on what is actually a massive issue of delayed justice. Rather than fixing the source (including court delays, punitive Bail Act restrictions, lack of social housing), the approach seems to be seeking that the existing very stretched workforce provide additional psychological treatment and programmes to somehow meet this need.

If the proposal is to offer rehabilitation for convicted unsentenced (i.e. not unconvicted), the gap between conviction and sentencing is actually pretty short – in most cases less than three months. The practicalities of catching and making a difference with this cohort, during such timeframes are mindboggling (even just the issue of prisons finding the physical space for the rehabilitation programmes).

Members know that there aren't currently enough psychologists and associated resources to provide rehabilitation to those that are not on remand... so where would these psychologists and resources come from for those on remand? Will we be stretched too thin, and then people on existing waitlists be pushed down further in favour of something that looks good on paper but fails practically? Members are worried about what appears to be a 'feel good' individualised solution to a wider systemic problem.

Psychologists at Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa are a female dominated workforce and are covered by an active Pay Equity claim. In the eyes of these members, the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa needs to urgently assess the current state of pay inequality and set about fixing it. Corrections psychologists used to have salaries that were competitive with other relevant public service jurisdictions. This is no longer the case, and members believe that if something is not done urgently to address this, Corrections will face worsening problems with recruitment and retention. Delegates expect that earlier career psychologists will seek more lucrative opportunities elsewhere, and that Corrections will be further impacted by experienced psychologists being attracted to other opportunities that offer more flexibility, less pressure and stress, and significantly more attractive remuneration packages.

Psychologists in New Zealand are registered health practitioners. They are required to hold at least a master's level degree in psychology. At the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa, the majority of psychologists are registered clinical psychologists. It generally takes seven years or longer of full-time university study to become a registered clinical psychologist in New Zealand. Positions in clinical psychology programmes are very limited and entry is highly competitive, with many more applicants than available places.

The majority of psychologists in the Department of Corrections are considered specialists in the area of criminal justice psychology. They are mainly employed in Special Treatment Units (STUs) in prisons and Community Corrections sites which are located around the country. Psychologists are also employed in a range of managerial roles (including at the senior executive levels) and advisory positions. In recent years, psychologist have also been employed in mental health units (including clinical management roles) within the Department.

Although there are some differences between the roles of Community Corrections and STU-based psychologists, the majority of their work involves the assessment and treatment/rehabilitation of individuals who have been convicted of crimes, supervision of psychologists and other Departmental employees, and a range of advice and liaison activities.

Because of the limited availability of suitably trained psychologists, and in line with the principles of the Psychology of Criminal Conduct, psychologists work almost exclusively with individuals who have committed serious offences (e.g., significant violent and sexual offences) and who are most likely to reoffend. The reason for this is that focussing on individuals who commit serious offences and who are likely to reoffend, will have the greatest impact on reducing harm (i.e., fewer victims) and financial costs (e.g., legal/court costs, incarceration, and sentence management) to the public.

During this stage of their careers, psychologists in Corrections are exposed to significant pressure regarding clinical outputs. Corrections places a degree of importance on psychologists meeting key performance indicators in terms of the number of hours of contact time, the number of reports completed, the number of treatments commenced, and other matters. This degree of structure and pressure is not always something that psychologists in other jurisdictions experience. During this stage of their career's psychologists are required to adapt and cope with these pressures, or (as occurs fairly frequently) decide to pursue employment in other areas. PSA is also aware of some psychologists who have left their roles as they have become highly focussed on potential risks to themselves and their families as a result of repeated exposure to narratives involving highly harmful offences. It is noted that many psychologists who depart during this career stage have often been provided with significant training opportunities and a high degree of quality clinical supervision. This is necessary but comes at a significant cost to the Department.

At present, the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa faces a number of significant challenges regarding psychologists. There is a recognised international shortage of psychologists. The training of psychologists in New Zealand has notably failed to keep pace with demand, and Corrections (along with other employers of psychologists in New Zealand) are becoming increasingly reliant on psychologists who have trained overseas. While it is potentially beneficial to employ psychologists with a range of theoretical and cultural backgrounds, it is considered that New Zealand trained psychologists are likely (initially at least) better prepared to work with Department of Corrections clients, who are primarily New Zealanders, with a high proportion of Māori.

In recent years, the demand for psychologists has expanded rapidly, as have the number of employment opportunities for psychologists. One of the challenges for Corrections is retaining skilled and experienced psychologists, who have often received considerable investment from Corrections in terms of training and supervision. When psychologists leave Corrections, they can often achieve significantly higher earnings (based on similar workload) or similar earnings with a lighter workload. Psychologists who leave Corrections also find (often) that the clients with whom they engage are less interpersonally difficult, less likely to display interpersonal hostility, and are more likely to be motivated to engage in treatment. These psychologists also experience greater autonomy (i.e., ability to select tasks that they find interesting, enjoyable, or challenging).

While the Department of Corrections is a stimulating and sometimes enjoyable environment, which provides excellent experience and training opportunities for psychologists, the roles are demanding, and Corrections psychologists are exposed to significant stressors and workload pressures which the PSA believes do not apply to the same degree in other areas.

In our view it is vital that Corrections properly value the work of psychologists and other rehabilitative staff. It is vital that Corrections pay accordingly, to support the retention of experienced psychologists and promote recruitment of psychologists with a range of previous experience.

## Summary of Recommendations

This submission addresses six key areas of member concern, in relation to this amendment:

### 1. Workforce priorities

- Address workforce shortages, including the issue of staff retention.
- Properly value work and pay accordingly.
- Develop an integrated workforce with career paths which are seamless across Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa.
- Ensure pay and employment equity exists across Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa.

### 2. Ensure safe staffing

- Agree to safe staffing levels for all rehabilitative, frontline, and back-office functions across Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa.
- Address workforce shortages so that safe staffing levels are achieved without compromising health, safety, and wellbeing of members.
- Provide decent working conditions and access to professional development.

- Ensure safe staffing includes staff to PIOC ratios both in custodial settings and community settings.
- 3. Engage with staff**
  - Create a culture shift within the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa that values the experience of people working closely with PIOC.
- 4. Rehabilitative and reintegration support for PIOC**
  - Integrate services to provide continuity of care.
  - Fully fund and resource rehabilitative and reintegration support for PIOC.
  - Increase resources for forensic mental health services in prisons.
- 5. Mental Health and Addiction services**
  - Frame alcohol and other drug addiction as a health first issue, while also holding people to account for criminal behaviour.
  - Resource what works, such as Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Courts and services.
- 6. Devolution of services**
  - Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa is already reliant on a large number of contractors (i.e. such as private psychologists) to perform core Corrections duties. We wish to see the provision of these services brought in house.
  - We do not wish to see devolution to community organisations enabling contracting of these services to private for-profit providers, many of which are multinational.

## Member feedback - What are you most proud of about your work at the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa?

*“That I am making a difference in our community by assisting in keeping my community safe and supporting people to make positive changes in their lives and reduce their risk of reoffending”.*

*“Supporting people to live better lives, be the best they can be and choose a positive way of life”.*

*“Making a difference to others. Helping rehabilitate them and become valued members of society. Creating social supports for people and enhancing their wellbeing”.*

*“Being able to serve the public by keeping them safe. Having the opportunity to assist high risk offenders engaging and succeeding with rehabilitation”.*

*“That I can walk alongside vulnerable people and be part of their highway to meaningful change for themselves and their whanau. I also take pride in my role in keeping communities safe, responding to risk, and engaging with communities”.*

*“Helping people realize their worth and true potential and seeing them working towards the future they want”.*

*“That me and my colleagues turn up to work every day to do our mahi and support those in our care, despite COVID, despite putting ourselves at risk, despite struggling to pay for petrol and being paid an insulting amount of money”.*

*“I serve the Community of Whangarei. I help to keep members of the public safe, holding those that offend against them to account, whilst upholding the integrity of sentences imposed upon them by the Courts. I help to provide those people offending, with opportunities to improve their own and their whanau's situation - and to provide them with opportunities, should they wish to take them, to get work and to get their drivers licence”.*

*“That I get to work alongside some of our most vulnerable people (prisoners and offenders in the community) and support them to make meaningful changes which creates the opportunity*



*for a better and safer life for them, their whanau and society in general. It is an absolute humbling privilege to hear their back stories and to get to know them as fellow human beings, to give them an experience of being listened to, valued, and empowered by allowing them to decide what changes they want to make. In this way, I feel my mahi makes a valuable and much needed contribution to New Zealand society, making it safer for my own children and whanau as well as everyone else's. I am proud that every day I get to practice non-judgement, acceptance and be a positive role model for others. My mahi makes me a much better person and makes me more appreciative of the goodness in my life".*

## **Member feedback - What does a hard day at work look like at the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa?**

*"Dealing with multiple high-risk situations or competing priorities, hearing traumatic stories, doing my best to try and find somewhere for people to live, get access to food and services they need, managing a busy workload, supporting my colleagues, supporting the people I work with".*

*"Working up to 10 hours per day, taking work home, managing high risk people with complex issues, which means being responsive [having to drop work to deal with situations in the moment as they occur] and constantly monitoring them. This includes an element of worrying about them and what they are going to do next. There is a high level of responsibility to keep the community safe. Managing a multiple different tasks at once".*

*"10hrs+, most days no breaks, if you want to actually complete the work. Short staffing does not cater for an 8hr day. A non-busy/normal day I would work 07:30 - 17:00. Note no one is forcing me to do this, however realistically for targets to be met, considering short staffing this is unfortunately what it takes. I have never taken a 30-minute lunch break".*

*"Being tested by the most challenged people in society".*

*"High stress with managing high risk offenders, meeting unrealistic expectations with no leadership or experience with management. Front line staff suffer most with unworkable workloads."*

*"I am on the training scheme and my workdays have never been harder. There is NO work-life boundaries as I have assignments to complete. I did not realize this would be the case when I started, and the stress is hard".*

*“My role varies, often we are short staffed and under pressure. Our caseloads are often over our agreed 'safe' hours. We will be meeting people on sentence to complete risk assessments, refer them for supports, engage with supports, attend Court, lay urgent charges, and bail opposition, write reports including short turn around. Home visits to people without protection. This can all occur in a day. It does not factor the necessary health and safety work, cultural skill uplift, staff meetings”.*

*“Planning and delivering therapeutic programmes in the morning followed by hours of admin, assessments, and planning for the next programme”.*

*“Seems like working hard and getting an honest day’s work, then getting to pay day and finding it still hard to make ends meet financially”.*

*“Being 35 weeks pregnant, my days are hard. I am trying to wind up nine years of case load whilst maintaining all my reports and my growing case load. I try to be at work early each day and often don’t get a lunch break until 2pm”.*

*“Relentless demands on time - due to pressure of workloads or through staff attrition. Sickness is rife currently and the work still needs completing. Staff departures are not back filled leaving us short in all rolls. Demands from Courts to complete reports with shorter time frames - expectations that we provide countless opportunities for people to engage in interviews as somehow, it is our fault they don’t turn up to present their side of the story”.*

*“My mahi is varied. A busy day would involve delivering a therapeutic rehabilitative programme to a group of participants, writing up daily case notes for each of the participants, planning the next day's session, attending Kaupapa Māori Supervision (fortnightly) or practice supervision (weekly), attending team meetings (weekly), managing any issues with group participants (such as following up absences, managing barriers to participation such as transport), liaising with probation officers about their participants progress and organising/facilitating whanau engagement/hui to support participants. Delivering programmes can be emotionally draining because not only am I managing my own emotional responses, but also the behaviours and dynamics within the group, teaching skills to support participants to manage their emotions in safe and helpful ways and creating an atmosphere of trust and safety so the participants can gain the most benefit from the programme. Some days I go home 'peopled out' (exhausted physically and emotionally) which then impacts on how much I have to give to my partner and family.*

*“9 plus hours, no breaks and going home emotionally exhausted with the knowledge that the work you didn't get done will be waiting for you in the morning”.*

*“Myself/my family being threatened with physical harm/sexual assault. Working unpaid overtime regularly, up to four hours a day, without being able to take any breaks, due to the workload. Being thrown under the bus by Management/National Office, for not having the resources/staff to be able*

*to complete work to the standards we would like, and then something happens, and then not being backed when something is in the media”.*

*“1. Offenders turning up intoxicated or high. - 2. When we have to press the alarm or call Police due to threats to staff - 3. When we are short staffed, and several offenders turn up unannounced”.*

*“Minimum 9 hours paid for 8, dynamic risk issues arising that have to be dealt with straight away. Continuing grind of dealing with displaced, lower socio-economic communities that see no improve in their living conditions, quality of life or assistance for whanau and Tamariki.”*

*“Secondary trauma from exposure to horrific things (e.g. psych reports, court/police documents), working >40hrs per week and still not getting all of my work done”.*

*“6-8 hours of screen time, learning new ways to connect with people and negotiate the extremely difficult pathway to an offense free lifestyle. Up to 2 hours of face-to-face time dealing with people who are currently struggling to be effective members of society and the issues surrounding their lives”.*

*“A hard day at work can include many things, such as having to take immediate legal action in response to non-compliance, resolving disputes between residents, dealing with hostile and aggressive behaviour, and identifying and responding to escalating risk concerns”.*

*“A hard day typically could involve long hours, multiple staff assisting to address serious concerns with people we work with, could include potential for harm to others including staff and liaising with other services e.g. Police”.*

*“Overwhelming case load, angry colleagues, and difficult people in our care. Too many competing priorities. Feelings of doing thankless work that is not acknowledged by pay or some leadership. (My manager is amazing; others are not, and people bang their head against a brick bus when trying to seek help. I feel very lucky to be well supported so am speaking broadly here)”.*

*“Stress, feelings of not knowing what to do next, dealing with other people's caseload as we have lost so many staff either due to sickness or being re-deployed to fill gaps elsewhere - and then they are never replaced. Going home exhausted every night, close to burnout”.*

*“A hard day at work looks like working 10–12-hour days because something urgent arises (like a recall, arrest etc) and being verbally abused by various clients. My mental health deteriorated due to high workload and poor treatment from clients, resulting in me often going home upset or angry and taking it out on my whanau. I would also dread going to work on Mondays to the point that my whole Sunday would be miserable and tearful because I knew I'd have to return to a job that was breaking me down bit by bit. I'm currently on a secondment in another role that is no longer frontline, and I am thriving, however, my time as a Probation Officer was very difficult. I contemplated leaving Corrections many times because I felt like I was losing myself from the mahi. A hard day of work is logging onto your*

*computer first thing Christmas morning because you have so much work to do. A hard day of work as a Probation Officer is not worth the minimal pay for the workload, abuse, and weight of the mahi that is taken on."*

*"2 and a half hours traveling for work. Working inside prison facilities with limited staff and restrictions that impede on therapeutic alliance and environment. Then coming home as a single mother and doing everything".*

*"Home - Not having enough time in the day to engage with loved ones before running out of the door for work. Placing work priorities over family. School holiday cost, extended time at time. Work - Dealing with a crisis identified by the people we support. This can take time to navigate the support systems. at times the balancing act of notes, others and providing support to those in front of us can be a challenge".*

*"A hard day at work looks like leaving with 2 children at 7am to get them to carers and before school care before I drive for an hour to get to work. I then work for a full day with highly volatile men, listening to their stories of abuse and neglect, working through emotional management with them, and working through the often-distressing stories of their actions. After spending the rest of my day doing admin, I leave at 4:30, to drive home for an hour, pick up my children and hope to get home by 6".*

*"Having to fit everything in a day, while being emotionally and mentally drained or triggered after facilitating a session of a therapeutic programme. Recording all of the notes aligning to our objectives and being present while in hui on other matters such as working groups, workshops, governance groups, national councils".*

*"I worked a 12+ hour day yesterday. I was at work at 7am preparing for Court. The Court session ran from 9am to 6.30pm last night. By the time I packed up and returned to the office, I did not get home until 7.30pm. - The day consisted of sentencing multiple offenders with offending ranging from violence, child abuse, alcohol related offending and sexual offending. While it was a long day, it is also emotionally draining work. To not get home until late, means an inability to process what you have witnessed/read throughout the day".*

*"A hard day starts with an overwhelming number of emails. Deadlines for reports and court information. Rapid response to overnight arrests and breaches of court orders. Team meetings which are sometimes called urgently due to a staff member being threatened. Interviewing offenders and discussing graphic details of their offending. Missing a lunch break. Taking all the disturbing facts and conversations home in my head to my family. Feeling disengaged from my partner and children due to details of offending, including sexual offences and violence. Sleeping badly and feeling exhausted the next day".*

*“Working with the Department of Corrections has led to carrying a lot of stress due to us being unable to keep up with the day. We are overloaded with work, have short turn arounds on certain reports and are expected to immediately manage unexpected situations that arise. Probation Officers are time poor, there is not enough hours in the day to do the work that we do. Probation Officers are seen to work on annual leave, sick leave and outside our forty hours just to manage the work that we carry however, there is no recognition nor afterhours pay for this work. There have been certain times where we are overloaded which creates us to burn-out which is not ideal for our co-workers or our people”.*

*“Over 12 hours most days for what then works out to less than minimum wage. Despite being an experienced and committed practitioner with twenty-years’ experience in the field”.*

*“It is very tiring, get abused by prisoners on a daily basis, and it can also lead to serious harm to self if you get attacked/ punched by prisoners at work. By the time your day is done, one is basically naked with lack of staff etc”.*

*“Trauma. Reading about how the stress of financial difficulties is increasing family violence. Reading about how mothers are needing to shoplift to feed their kids, how fathers are needing to commit crimes to provide for their families. I read all the summary of facts, and need to somehow deal with that so I can be a good husband and father to my own family”.*

**PSA wishes to speak to our submission.**