

08 NEWS

'Absurd' spend of \$500k on Ashley

Rob Inglis

A decision to spend nearly half-a-million dollars on refurbishing Ashley Youth Detention Centre has been labelled "absurd" after the Tasmanian government pledged to close the facility by mid-2026.

The Department for Education, Children and Young People has awarded \$430,000 to Fairbrother to undertake an internal and external refurbishment of AYDC at Deloraine, with the contract running to June 30 next year.

The works come after the Commission of Inquiry expressed its disappointment that the government had not honoured its previous commitment to shut Ashley by 2024. One of the commission's recommendations was to close the centre "as soon as possible".

The COI identified "systemic harm and abuse" perpetrated against children and young people at AYDC over the course of decades, which it described as a "horrific blight on Tasmania".

The government plans to replace Ashley with a detention facility, support centre, and assisted bail facility in the state's south, and another support centre and bail facility in the north.

Independent Nelson MLC Meg Webb was scathing of the Liberals' decision to invest in improvements to the existing facilities at Ashley, questioning why the government wasn't in-

stead directing this money to support interim measures to reduce the number of children detained there, which she said would "presumably reduce need for these building works".

"The state entering into large contracts such as this sends concerning mixed messages to workers and advocates calling for swift implementation of the government's promise to close Ashley," she said.

"This is a problem of the government's own making. The closure of AYDC was announced three years ago but failure to expedite that closure is proving costly for the safety and welfare of our children, for workers, and for taxpayers.

"Sinking further good money after bad is absurd."

Children and Youth Minister Roger Jaensch said the government had committed to undertaking the works at Ashley in response to recommendations from the COI.

"These works are focused on improving the safety and well-being of young people in the centre until such time as it can be closed," he said.

"The government has been clear that the closure of [AYDC] is a priority and remains committed to closing it as soon as possible.

Mr Jaensch said the government was committed to reforming the youth justice system, but that it would take time.

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