



ACTION FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OF PRISONERS

Ms. Caron McCaffrey, Director General,
Irish Prison Service,
IPS HQ, Ballinalee Road,
Longford

06/09/2023

Dear Ms McCaffrey,

We write to you on behalf of the *Action for Children and Families of Prisoners Network*, to follow up on our last meeting on 18th April 2023.

We wish to bring to your attention some key concerns raised by Network members in recent times that we hope to discuss further at our meeting on 15th September.

These concerns include:

- Families facing continuous issues with arranging visits both online and over the phone. This is an issue that has been brought to the attention of the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) on a regular basis.

We would like to know what measures IPS is taking to address this issue?

- The Irish Prison Service's (IPS) website appears not to be updated regularly and calls to prisons often remain unanswered. When families or organisations are looking for information or try to book a visit, they struggle to get up-to-date information from the IPS website.

Can you advise us as to how or where families can access updated information on visits or on their family member?

- There appears to be a no enhanced visits in Wheatfield prison. It has been described by members of the Network as being a great facility but one that is never used.

Do people in Wheatfield prison have access to enhanced visits and what are the criteria to qualify for these visits?

- Concerns have been raised on the rights of people in prison:
 - to be able to practice their chosen religion within the prison.
 - being locked down for long periods of time.
 - not being able to consistently access education or health care.
 - to ensure their health and safety due to the issue of overcrowding.

What measures are the IPS taking to overcome these situations?

- Members of the Network agree that there is a need for anonymised data to be collated and made publicly available in relation to children with a parent in prison as well as information on the placement of children in care or with other family members when their

parents are imprisoned. The availability of this data would enable services to provide increased supports for all children impacted by parental imprisonment.

Is there a possibility that this data could be collated and made publicly available by the IPS?

- Network members have also highlighted the ongoing need for funding to conduct relevant research to support children of people in prison, identify and address any particular needs they have and remove them from the almost invisible status they occupy in the Irish policy landscape. Clearly, there are very few researchers focused on this cohort of children and young people and hardly any opportunities to carry out such research.

Has the IPS any plan to support and work with researchers to identify particular issues for this cohort of children and improve their wellbeing and outcomes?

We would like to thank you for considering our letter, and to acknowledge and thank you and your colleagues for the ongoing work to address the concerns of people in prison and their families.

Kind regards,



Dr Fiona Donson, Director
Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights,
School of Law,
University College Cork

Ashling Tobin
Children and Families Initiative:
Project Coordinator
Irish Penal Reform Trust

(On behalf of the *Action for Children and Families of Prisoners Network*)