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| **Hon Kelvin Davis**  **Minister of Corrections** |  |
| 13 June 2018 | **SPEECH NOTES** |

**Waikeria prison announcement**

Good Afternoon everyone, and thank you for being here today.

Now, I know I get criticised for not always being the smoothest in the House, or the best at media interviews.

Working on the hard issues; putting my head down and finding good solutions to big problems is what I do best.

I came into Parliament because I want to make a real difference for New Zealand on the hard issues – especially those that affect Maori.

And in my opinion there is no greater risk to the future of Maori, than the increasing incarceration of my people.

That’s why kaumatua from Ngati Maniapoto and Ngati Raukawa are here today.

Because it is of utmost importance that Government work with whanau, hapu and iwi to face this challenge together.

I have taken my time on the decision concerning the previous Government’s plan to build at Waikeria.

After looking at all the options and taking a range of advice I am confident we have come to the right decision.

And that is important as we look at the short term and long term problems our Corrections system faces.

One of the first prisons I visited after becoming Minister was Waikeria.

And the first thing that I thought was: This place is horrific.

The yards are like animal cages. It was first designed 100 years ago and isn’t fit for purpose for either staff or prisoners.

Now, I know prisons shouldn’t be resorts.

Offenders must face consequences - and the loss of freedom is punishment for the crimes people commit.

But in saying that, we shouldn’t be sending people to prison to become better criminals rather than better people.

We all know the state that our prison system is in.

We have 10,600 people inside a network designed to house 9,254.

That is too many people.

Too many people already inside our prisons cells, and far too many people looking to join them.

And most importantly, too many victims.

We inherited a network that was already under stress and heading even further in the wrong direction.

We as a country have a real problem.

And we need to be real about the solution.

There is no silver bullet, no single tweak we can make to legislation that is going to address the problem overnight.

The solutions we are putting in place will be tough – but it is a good start.

Like I said at the beginning, I didn’t come into this role to cover up the cracks with band aids.

I wasn’t going to double-down on a broken system.

My father always told me: Doing the right thing isn’t always easy, but it’s always right.

Decades of rushed policy and reactive decisions have gotten us to this point today.

First off – we need to find a way to deal with the numbers of people currently coming through the prison gates.

Let’s be clear, even if the previous Government had made a decision to build their American-style mega prison before they left office, we would be facing the same capacity crisis we are in today.

It would have changed nothing.

We need to add beds to the system to relieve some of the immediate capacity pressures over the next 12-18 months.

That’s why we have already approved the construction of 976 rapid builds.

These are not meant to be permanent structures – but are a necessary measure to relieve immediate pressures.

By the second quarter of next year we will be adding:

* 244 rapid build beds to Rolleston Prison
* 122 to Tongariro Prison

Coming online in the fourth quarter of 2019 will be:

* 244 at Rimutaka Prison
* 122 at Christchurch Womens’ Prison, and;
* 244 at Christchurch Mens’ prison

From the outset I wanted Corrections to look at steps they could take to ensure the current system is operating more effectively.

They have identified and are working to resolve the following four issues:

* Firstly, removing administrative barriers that prevent the release of those who are eligible for bail.
* Secondly, reducing the likelihood of future offending by giving extra support to defendants on bail.
* Thirdly, speeding up court appearances to reduce delays for those remanded in custody.
* Lastly, replicating the success of Alcohol and Drug Courts.

These programmes are on track to save a further 150 beds, or over 54,000 bed nights per year, freeing up approximately $15 million dollars in costs.

We are also looking at housing.

Being homeless increases an offender’s likelihood of committing crime.

A lack of appropriate housing has made re-integration difficult.

There are hundreds of people currently in prison who are ready to be released but for the fact there is no suitable housing for them to be released to.

That’s why Budget 2018 sets aside $57.6 million over the next four years to provide housing and importantly support services for over 300 people a year, tailored to meet individual needs.

Participants will be supported into training and employment, and will be able to access health services, develop life skills, address the causes of their offending, and build relationships alongside their whānau and communities.

We are doing a lot of work. Good work. And I am proud of the progress we are making to relieve immediate pressures.

Now let’s look at the long term.

In 2021 the prison population is projected to have increased by a further 2,877.

To be clear: These projections take into account the possible impact of increased Police numbers.

This Government has decided that Corrections, together with the wider justice sector, will address these capacity issues.

Our role in addressing these issues, is to add an extra 1,000 beds to the prison network.

The easy answer would have been to build a mega prison.

It’s just not the right thing to do.

And I refuse to continue a failed system and then scale it up even more.

The problem isn’t just that we don’t have enough prison beds – it’s that too many people are entering into our justice system and walking through our prison gates in the first place.

A mega prison would have been a sign we had given up - before we had even attempted to fix the real problem.

Only yesterday, a report from the Chief Science Advisor found that a major solution to New Zealand’s rising prison population is intervening in the lives of very young children, and stopping the “school to prison pipeline”.

It found that 87 percent of young offenders had been referred to Oranga Tamariki when they were children, and more than half had a mental illness.

Intervening early could prevent these children entering prison.

What we announce here today is a significant change in direction for prisons in New Zealand.

Today I am announcing that we will build a world-leading 500 bed facility here at Waikeria alongside a 100 bed mental health unit that is the first of its kind in New Zealand.

We know smaller prisons are more effective in providing real rehabilitation, and this facility will be one of the smallest prisons in New Zealand.

From the outset it was blindingly obvious that there is a massive problem with mental health issues in our prisons.

What I can’t understand is why no government took serious action to address this.

Until now.

Until we address the underlying issues, like mental health, we will always struggle to address re-offending.

In the room today I want to thank Cherryl Robertson, Health Centre Manager, and her dedicated team of Nurses.

They are the ones who stare the mental health problems in the face every day. And I know they will appreciate how important today’s announcement is.

The plans for Waikeria strike the right balance between showing hardened criminals the consequences of their actions, and, providing a new facility that can work to rehabilitate prisoners and reduce our appalling rate of re-offending.

I will be doing further work on a strategy that will ensure we carry this new direction across the entire prison network.

The next phase will be to add 400 new beds across the network.

And we want those facilities to be small in scale, closer to communities and better linked to local work programmes.

I want to take some time to respond to the Leader of the Opposition’s remarks suggesting that we have to build an American styled mega prison to keep the public safe.

He is wrong. Calling for a mega prison to be built is just lazy politics.

American-style mega prisons are crime breeding factories.

They swallow up young offenders, and spit out harden criminals, sometimes a fully patched gang member.

They do not keep communities safe.

We have chosen to build a smaller prison.

Because smaller prisons work.

International evidence shows the benefits of small prisons are:

* + they can be built locally, allowing prisoners to be closer to their families
  + staff morale is typically higher in small facilities, as management is more visible and people are more likely to know each other

* + Most importantly, they are safer, providing a better ability to monitor prisoner wellbeing.

Evidence suggests that large prisons result in poor social environments and prisoner outcomes because they can be impersonal and focus on procedure rather than people.

I want to finish my address by speaking directly to our Corrections officers.

Thank you.

You are on the frontline, keeping New Zealand safe.

You are guardians; you are teachers; you are mentors - and Corrections officers.

And I know you are under pressure.

But I want to assure you. We have a plan. It starts today.

You are vital to its success; our most valuable asset in achieving our Government’s goal of reducing the prison population by 30% over the next 15 years.

Today, we have drawn a line under years of failed prison policy in New Zealand.

I ask you to join me, and this Government, on a new journey towards better prisons that make our communities safer.

Thank you.