Justice Committee

Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from the Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending

The Scottish Working Group on Women’s Offending (SWGWO) welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Justice Committee’s scrutiny of the proposed Management of Offenders Bill.

Our comments are restricted to Section 1 of the Bill concerning the use of electronic monitoring for offenders.

SWGWO are supportive of the increased use of electronic monitoring as an alternative to both remand and custodial sentences. The numbers of individuals remanded into custody are significantly greater than the numbers of individuals being placed on Supervised Bail. SWGWO would support the use of electronic monitoring as a condition of Supported Bail where appropriate. Similarly SWGWO would support the use of electronic monitoring as a condition of a community based disposal as an alternative to custody. In both cases it is important that packages of support are provided alongside the restriction of liberty.

When I was invited to participate in a roundtable discussion with the Justice Committee on 16 January 2018 I provided statistical information on the frequency sentencers made requests for bail information (7278) and the number of supervised bail cases imposed (355) in 2015-16.¹ With the exception of 1 year these numbers were the lowest in 7 years. The figures for 2016-17 have now been published and again there has been a further decline in the number of requests for bail information made by sentencers (6995) and the number of supervised bail cases imposed (335).²

For the roundtable discussion I also provided information on the remand population. Remand accounts for a disproportionate amount of admissions to custody: across Scotland approximately 3000 women are imprisoned each year, almost two thirds of these admissions are for remand. In 2013-14 there were 2835 women admitted into prison, 1805 were remands and 1030 were sentenced.³ Statistics consistently show that women are more likely than men to be on remand, and that only 30% of women on remand go on to receive a custodial sentence.⁴ On 13 April 2018 there were 370 women in prison, 84 (23%) were on remand. For men the overall population was 7075 with 1073 (18%) on remand.⁵

SWGWO believes that the bail and court statistics provide convincing evidence that there is opportunity for the extending the use of electronic monitoring as an alternative to the use of custody.

Should the Justice Committee require any additional information from SWGWO we will be happy to do so.

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