

19 December 2022

C161893

S 9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe S 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email of 16 November 2022 to the Ministry of Justice, which was partially transferred to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about policies and strategies used to reduce the prison population and staff shortages. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested:

Can you please advise what policies or strategies the government has used in the last five years, or what advice it has given to the police, the Corrections Department or judges that have led to this dramatic drop in the prison population.

Since the peak of 10,820 prisoners in March 2018, the number of people in New Zealand prisons has decreased significantly, with the prison population at 7,882 as at 16 December 2022.

While Corrections does not have the ability to directly impact the number of people entering prison, cross-agency initiatives such as the High Impact Innovation Programme (HIIP) have been maximising safe and appropriate access to bail, parole, and home detention.

Since its establishment, the HIIP has helped defendants overcome administrative or accommodation-related barriers to achieving bail, thereby reducing the time some people are spending on remand. It has also improved compliance with bail conditions (for defendants in the community) and helped long-serving prisoners to achieve parole and comply with their parole conditions.

The HIIP initiatives also provide increased support to people in the justice system, reducing harm and improving the likelihood of compliance with any conditions imposed on them. Please see Appendix One for a summary of the initiatives that have been trialled and implemented by the HIIP team

The media have been reporting that there is a significant shortage of officers in every prison in the country. *Is this in any way related to the reduced number of people being sent to prison.*

Like many other agencies and businesses, we have experienced a number of inter-connected challenges, with COVID-19 stressors, border closures and record low unemployment rates making it more challenging to recruit and retain staff. COVID-19 has also impacted staffing levels due to sickness.

To respond to this, and as COVID-19 cases in prisons have now dropped considerably across the country, we have been temporarily moving some men and women to different prisons to alleviate pressure on staff at our most affected sites to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing is not put at risk. This is also about making sure we can increase minimum entitlements (including unlock hours, which mean more time out of their cells).

We are making a concerted effort to recruit, retain and train staff. This includes strengthening our recruitment processes, improving our onboarding processes, implementing new rosters which provide our staff with better work/life balance and help them to avoid fatigue, and continuously working to improve staff safety.

We are actively working to recruit new Corrections Officers across the country and our staff have also been carrying out recruitment activities in their local communities (for example, information evenings for people interested in working with us).

Over the last three months, we have received over 1,400 applications to become a Corrections Officer.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Alex Donnison
Principal Adviser Ministerial Services
People and Capability