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HARDCORE RE-OFFENDERS IN GOVERNMENT SIGHTS

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson says he is examining plans to send hardcore offenders who are alleged to have committed another serious offence while out on parole straight back to jail with no opportunity for bail.

“What we need to do is get hardcore re-offenders off the street and in jail where I think they belong,” Mr Atkinson says.

Mr Atkinson says the Government shares the public’s concern about this type of offender.

“We need to change the law to make sure they no longer pose a threat to public safety until they have served their time or been acquitted.”

Mr Atkinson says he is looking at changes to the *Bail Act 1985* so that if an offender, previously convicted of a serious offence, is alleged to have committed another serious offence, while on parole, he automatically returns to prison; without the option of applying for bail.

He says he is also investigating where the law needs to be tightened so that offenders, when sentenced to jail with a set non-parole period, have all bail agreements for any other unheard charges automatically revoked.

He says the Government will further consider changes to the *Bail Act* that will compel police, magistrates and judges, when considering bail, to make an offender’s history of serious repeat offending a paramount consideration when deciding whether or not to grant bail.

The Attorney-General says such changes are his preferred way of dealing with the matters highlighted by last week’s tragedy.

“Dismantling our bail legislation is not necessary and an over-reaction and would be rightly condemned as a knee-jerk response.

“Yet that is exactly what the Liberals are proposing. By opportunistically seizing on Mr Godfrey’s death they are planning to re-cycle an unaffordable and unworkable law that was discredited two years ago,” he says.

Mr Atkinson says that even a conservative application of the Liberal proposals would see a huge increase in the numbers of alleged offenders on remand.

“Our prisons could not cope with that and our courts could not cope with that and the public would not tolerate that. We already have the highest rate of alleged offenders remanded in custody of any State in Australia.

“What the Opposition won’t tell us is how or where they plan to house all these extra inmates.

“This is a party that when in Government pulled the plug on a new women’s prison and dropped a much-needed men’s prison from the Budget forward estimates.

“Headlines are cheap, action is not.

“That is why we are building new prisons at Mobilong to boost the number of cells,” Mr Atkinson says.

Under the Rann Government’s law and order policies:

- South Australia’s prison population is growing by 7.8 per cent *per annum*.
- Offenders are being given longer sentences by the courts.
- Offenders are spending longer in prison.
- Crime is falling (8.2% since we came to power).
- Police numbers are continuing to grow to record levels.

“Those are the facts. We don’t just talk tough on law and order we walk the walk.