

Female inmates that serve jail time with their babies significantly less likely to reoffend

September 15 2017, by Candy Gibson

Women able to care for their infants while serving time in prison are significantly less likely to reoffend, according to a new report launched last night by a University of South Australia lawyer.

Presenting the case for a mother-and-infant facility to be built at Adelaide Women's Prison, UniSA law lecturer Juliette McIntyre says there are strong financial, social and emotional arguments for keeping female inmates close to their newborns.

"Not only are reoffending rates lower, but [new mothers](#) have the chance to learn parenting skills and to bond with their child. If those attachments are not formed, there are significant negative impacts for the child's future, including a higher risk of perpetuating a cycle of crime as teenagers and adults," McIntyre says. "Children have a fundamental right not to be separated from their parents."

The report, launched by the Women Lawyers' Association of South Australia, includes plans for a high-quality multipurpose family centre to complement the secure facilities at the Northfield Prison Complex on Grand Junction Road.

McIntyre says it would cost approximately \$3.8 million to build and staff the facility, but much of this would be offset by savings in other areas.

"It costs around \$92,000 each year to keep a person in jail in South Australia. Add to that the expense of out-of-home care for infants of

female inmates and this blows out to more than \$100,000 per annum," McIntyre says.

South Australia is the only state in Australia not to provide live-in accommodation for [children](#) of mothers in custody.

"This is despite leading the nation back in the 1990s when it established a mother and baby program at the Adelaide Women's Prison." The facility was closed due to lack of funding and pressure on bed space.

The majority of South Australia's female [prison](#) population are mothers, but current visiting hours at the Adelaide Women's Prison are restricted and permit a mother in custody to see her children for just a few hours per week; presuming the child is able to make the journey.

"The children of incarcerated [mothers](#) are the forgotten victims of crime," McIntyre says. "By establishing a mother-and-infant facility at Adelaide Women's Prison we can make great strides in bringing South Australia back into line with the nation and the world, and protecting the rights of children at the same time."

Provided by University of South Australia

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