

Plan is doomed to fail, Tolley is warned

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WOMEN and children would be exposed to further harm from violent partners by a controversial Corrections Department programme, critics say.

A tender for organisations to pilot a programme for domestic violence offenders was suspended last week after community providers largely boycotted it.

In a letter to Corrections Minister Anne Tolley, National Network of Stopping Violence Services partnerships co-chairwoman Shell Brown said the programme undermined years of research and development by the network, lacked expert analysis and "significantly increases the potential for harm to already vulnerable women and children".

Provider representatives, who asked not to be named in case they jeopardised government funding, told *The Dominion Post* they decided almost en masse not to tender because the programme's one-size-fits-all approach was a waste of taxpayer money that would lead to offenders falling through the cracks, potentially putting their partners and children at further risk.

But Tolley said the programme would go ahead as planned.

Brown told *The Dominion Post* family violence was different to other crime, and risk to victims could be increased by programmes that did not understand local dynamics.

In another letter to Tolley and Justice Minister Judith Collins, she said the programme lacked analysis of victims' safety and offenders' accountability.

Also of concern was a "doubling up" of work caused by a lack of communication between Corrections and the Ministry of Justice on changes they were each implementing in the sector.

"We strongly recommend that you reconsider the Corrections programme and look at evaluating existing programmes, that have been developed and run by family violence intervention specialists," Brown wrote to Tolley.

One of the providers, who asked not to be named, said the department had isolated itself from years of experience and local



Corrections Minister Anne Tolley

knowledge as well as international best practice in pursuing a "substandard" programme.

It would increase providers' workload but reduce their resources, lacked gender and cultural perspectives, was not long enough, did not consult enough with victims, delayed offenders' placement and was too inflexible.

Tolley said a more results-based focus and more measuring of programmes' effectiveness was needed.

"We can no longer be satisfied with simply filling places on programmes. I can't get involved in the tender process, and I'm advised there has been a slight delay. If that is what is needed to get this right, then it is worth it."

Corrections spokesman Ben Clark said the department was happy with its consultation process and review of international best practice for the programme, which was not a one-size-fits-all approach.

"This pilot will give us the ability to test different delivery approaches for offenders. The pilot will explore how to best respond to the needs of the individual and how to increase completion rates, which historically have been around the 50 per cent mark... We feel that we can do better."

Rather than abandoning the pilot, Corrections had paused the tender process "for a few days", he said.

WHAT IS THE PILOT?

Courts and Corrections can order perpetrators of domestic violence to attend programmes to help them change their behaviour.

These are usually delivered by non-governmental organisations that work with police, courts, probation and other agencies to try to deal with the wider causes of domestic violence.

On March 13, Corrections Minister Anne Tolley announced a pilot programme for domestic violence offenders as part of the Government's aim of reducing reoffending by 25 per cent by 2017.

Under it, domestic violence offenders would take part in 26 sessions over 60 hours, with a focus on drug and alcohol misuse, relationship and parenting skills and managing emotions and attitudes.

It was to be piloted from July, evaluated and then implemented nationally in 2015.

Tolley said a "more effective, uniform approach" based on international best practice should replace local programmes. A feature would be its more flexible access, with sessions at night and at weekends.