

09 June 2026

**Submission** to the Committee Secretariat for the Justice Committee on the **Corrections (Management of Prisoners, and Prisoners' Property) Amendment Bill**.

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland greatly welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Corrections (Management of Prisoners, and Prisoners' Property) Amendment Bill.

Our contribution on this Bill, as with all our public submissions, is informed by Catholic Social Teaching (CST), which uphold the dignity of every person and calls for justice systems that not only promote safety, but also enact restorative justice<sup>1</sup>, healing, and successful reintegration.<sup>2</sup> We recognise the importance of protecting the public and ensuring safe prison environments. Concurrently, we also emphasise the importance of how this can best be achieved, and whether it reflects our collective values as a society.

We therefore acknowledge the need to safely manage high-risk prisoners. However, we challenge aspects of the Bill that place too strong an emphasis on control and segregation, and insufficient attention to rehabilitation and human dignity.

**Visit the Imprisoned**

Being of Catholic and Christian faith, we affirm that visiting the imprisoned is not only morally and spiritually important, but a direct expression of the Catholic commitment to human dignity, mercy, and solidarity. It is an action we consider to be a 'corporal work of mercy'.<sup>3</sup> We also strongly agree to legislation aligning to specific sections of the Nelson Mandela Rules by banning prolonged solitary confinement and introducing a 'meaningful human contact' threshold. For this reason, Prison Chaplaincy<sup>4</sup> and faith ministries that visit the imprisoned are essential, both for the faith life of the visitor and those

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<sup>1</sup> *Restorative Justice - Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition*. (2026). Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition. <https://www.catholicprisonministries.org/restorative-justice>

<sup>2</sup> *Catholic bishops say reconciliation, not revenge, needed in prisons*. (2009, July 17). New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. <https://www.catholic.org.nz/news/media-releases/catholic-bishops-say-reconciliation-not-revenge-needed-in-prisons>

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Van Sloun, M. (2016, June 22). *Visit the imprisoned - TheCatholicSpirit.com*. The Catholic Spirit. <https://www.thecatholicspirit.com/news/local-news/special-sections/year-of-mercy/visit-the-imprisoned/>

<sup>4</sup> *Prison Chaplaincy*. (2026). Prison Chaplaincy; Tira Tūhāhā Prison Chaplaincy Aotearoa. <https://www.prisonchaplaincy.org.nz/>

imprisoned. Prison Chaplaincy should be formally recognised as contributing and accomplishing meaningful human contact obligations.<sup>5</sup>

The Bill introduces a new requirement for ‘minimum meaningful human contact for all prisoners’ of 10 – 14 hours over a week and/or fortnightly frequency. We fully support this introduction, as it increases the opportunity to formally embed Chaplaincy as a core and necessary prison service. We agree that Corrections must ensure prisoners are not completely isolated and receive regular – and we would add genuine – human interaction throughout their sentence. Moreover, Chaplaincy should be recognised as an act of qualifying and quantifying “meaningful human contact” and become a more official and structured part of prison management, not an optional add-on. By formally recognising and integrating Chaplaincy and faith ministry in prison management care, the case to maintain **guaranteed access** to those most vulnerable is also strengthened.

### **Chaplaincy as Meaningful Human Contact**

We cannot emphasise enough how Prison Chaplaincy can expand the definition in word and deed of ‘meaningful human contact’ and interaction. Chaplaincy provides:

- Authentic human connection grounded in dignity and respect
- Emotional, spiritual, and cultural support that promotes healing
- A non-judgemental presence that fosters trust and accountability.

Chaplaincy also meaningfully contributes and reflects a restorative vision of justice by concentrating on aspects of:

- Personal accountability
- Reconciliation as a pathway to redemption
- Development of hope and purpose.

Furthermore, Chaplaincy depends on trust, and its effectiveness relies on a clear distinction from prison security and surveillance functions.

We emphasise that **pastoral independence and confidentiality are non-negotiable**. Without these protections, Chaplaincy cannot fulfil its restorative purpose or maintain the trust essential for genuine transformation.

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<sup>5</sup> *Chaplaincy services in NZ prisons reaching hundreds - CathNews New Zealand*. (2026, May 4). CathNews New Zealand. <https://cathnewsnz.com/2026/05/05/chaplaincy-services-in-nz-prisons-reaching-hundreds/>

This ensures Chaplaincy remains a safe and trusted space for reflection, reconciliation, and change. We encourage the Committee to recognise and embed Prison Chaplaincy as meeting, and directly contributing, to meaningful and genuine human interaction.

Chaplaincy and spiritual care are important, necessary, and often overlooked, dimensions of a humane Corrections system.

### **Restrictions**

From the standpoint of human dignity, the use of restrictive regimes, the introduction of ‘designated-management prisoners (DMP)’ and expanding grounds for segregation reflects an increase in complexity within the prison system that is a cause for concern.<sup>6</sup> We recognise and acknowledge the need for safety. However, CST reminds us that even the most serious offenders remain persons with inherent dignity.

Our concerns are that:

- Extended or repeated segregation will cause serious psychological harm<sup>7</sup>
- Isolation will undermine prospects for long-term rehabilitation.

While we welcome safeguards such as minimum meaningful human contact and the prohibition of prolonged solitary confinement, these protections must be practical, enforceable, and consistently applied.

### **Implications to Chaplaincy**

It would be expected that with the likelihood of more prisoners being placed in segregated isolation the greater the pastoral and spiritual demand will be. Our concern is what consequences will arise from reduced accessibility to those most in need. This would indicate a potential:

- Increase in numbers needing emotional/spiritual support
- Limited or constrained physical and relational access.

Several provisions in the Bill have direct operational implications for the delivery of Chaplaincy services within prisons. In particular, the introduction of designated-management prisoners (DMP), expanded use of segregation, and the new framework for “meaningful human contact” will significantly shape both access to prisoners and the role Chaplaincy is able to play.

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<sup>6</sup> Wall, T. (2021, May 27). “Mum, I’m starting to talk to myself”: Life in solitary confinement in Aotearoa’s prisons. Stuff. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/300313192/mum-im-starting-to-talk-to-myself-life-in-solitary-confinement-in-aotearoas-prisons>

<sup>7</sup> Brown, E. (May-June 2020). *A systematic review of the effects of prison segregation. Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 52, 101389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2020.101389>

We envision a few possible scenarios to these changes:

- That Chaplaincy will be in greater demand
- An increase on Chaplain services for psychological and spiritual support
- A likely shortage of qualified Chaplains to meet rising demand, unless proactive workforce planning and investment occur
- **Risk of Chaplains being drawn into security functions.**

This cannot be stressed enough, the pressure to share information or be part of risk management should never directly or indirectly implicate the role of a Prison Chaplain. Inmates will become less open and avoid engagement entirely: affecting trust, confidentiality and ultimately the effectiveness and reach of pastoral care.

### **Recommendations for Chaplaincy:**

- Chaplains to maintain consistent access to prisoners, including DMP who are at risk or require a higher degree of spiritual care and connection
- Pastoral relationships remain uninterrupted
- Regularly allocated and adequate times for spiritual, pastoral and sacramental processes are factored
- Additional employment and volunteer opportunities for spiritual support workers
- Safeguards to protect the sacred bond of spiritual accompaniment.

A Corrections system is ultimately a reflection of the kind of society we seek to be. Safety is essential, but it must be accompanied by dignity, compassion, and hope.

Chaplaincy plays a vital role in making this possible. Ensuring access to spiritual and pastoral care especially for those most isolated, supports not only individuals, but the wider goal of a safer and more humane society.<sup>8</sup>

### **Chaplaincy Evaluation:**

1. The 'meaningful contact rule' could present an opportunity to formalise Prison Chaplaincy
2. DMP classification may restrict access to highest-need prisoners
3. Expanding segregation could signify greater need but less access.

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<sup>8</sup> *Prison Chaplains - Providing Faith And Hope On The Inside - Catholic Development Fund. (2026).* Catholic Development Fund (CDF); Catholic Diocese of Christchurch. <https://cdf.org.nz/prison-chaplains-providing-faith-and-hope-on-the-inside/>

4. Solitary confinement limits may increase reliance on Chaplains
5. Flexible segregation powers may disrupt pastoral continuity
6. A risk-focused system may compromise the Chaplaincy trust and confidentiality relationship.

### **Freedom of Religion and the Common Good**

Participation in worship and access to sacraments are essential aspects of faith life.

We are concerned that:

- Group worship opportunities may diminish under proposed segregation changes
- Sacramental access may become limited under restrictive regimes

We urge that reasonable and practical access to religious practice be maintained for all prisoners. Furthermore, we believe a just Corrections system serves the common good not only through security, but through **reducing reoffending and restoring individuals to community life.**<sup>9</sup>

We note that the Bill places limited emphasis on:

- Rehabilitation programmes
- Mental and emotional health, and addiction support
- Reintegration pathways.

From our perspective, **safety and rehabilitation are not competing goals, they are interdependent.** Adequate provisions for prisoner support and care should be included in the Bill.

### **Overall Recommendations to the Committee:**

- Ensure limits and safeguards on the use of segregation
- Strengthen the Bill's focus on rehabilitation and reintegration
- Recognise **Chaplaincy as an essential service** within Corrections
- Confirm access to Chaplaincy for all prisoners, including those in restrictive regimes.
- Acknowledge Chaplaincy as contributing to **meaningful human contact**

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<sup>9</sup> Waco, C. D. I. for S. of R. B. U. O. B. P. #97236. (2020, May 27). *The effect of religiosity on emotional well-being among prisoners*. Research Outreach. <https://researchoutreach.org/articles/effect-religiosity-emotional-wellbeing-among-prisoners/>

- Protect the independence and confidentiality associated with pastoral practice
- Maintain reasonable access to religious services and sacraments.

### **Te Tiriti o Waitangi Obligations**

We affirm the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Crown’s obligations of partnership, participation, equity, and active protection within the corrections system. Given the significant overrepresentation of Māori in prison.<sup>10</sup> It is essential that the provisions of this Bill, particularly those relating to segregation, high-risk classifications, and restrictive management, are assessed for their disproportionate impact on Māori. There is a risk that expanded control measures may deepen existing inequities and further entrench patterns of isolation and marginalisation.<sup>11</sup>

Restrictive regimes may also undermine **whānau engagement, cultural identity, and spiritual wellbeing (wairua)**, all of which are central to rehabilitation and reintegration. Access to **spiritual care, including Chaplaincy**, is especially important in this context, as it provides meaningful human connection and supports holistic wellbeing. Any reduction in access to such support, particularly for those in high-security or segregated conditions, risks compounding disadvantage for Māori prisoners. Upholding Te Tiriti requires that Māori wellbeing, cultural identity, and pathways to rehabilitation are actively protected, not incidentally preserved.

### **Upholding Te Tiriti Recommendations**

We recommend that the Committee:

- Assess and monitor the Bill’s disproportionate impact on Māori, particularly in the use of segregation and high-risk classifications
- Ensure implementation is consistent with Te Tiriti principles including, participation, equity and active protection
- Support and resource Māori-led and kaupapa Māori approaches to rehabilitation and prisoner management

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<sup>10</sup> *Wāhine Māori overrepresented in the criminal justice system* | New Zealand Ministry of Justice. (2026, February 24). Justice.govt.nz. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/about/news-and-media/media-releases/wahine-maori-overrepresented-in-the-criminal-justice-system/>

Hassan, M. (n.d.). *AWA - Social Sciences: Causes of Maori over-representation in prison*.

Awa.auckland.ac.nz; The University of Auckland. <https://awa.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=social-sciences&textid=1456>

<sup>11</sup>Plum, A. (2025, November 27). *Māori face harsher sentences than NZ Europeans for similar drink-driving offences – with lasting consequences*. The Conversation. <https://doi.org/10.64628/aa.ktfvxrmtc>

- Maintain and strengthen access to **whānau, cultural practices, and spiritual care**, including Chaplaincy
- Embed **wairua and holistic wellbeing** in corrections policy and practice.

### **Conclusion:**

We truly believe that "Life is not defined solely by one's mistakes [and] there is always the possibility to start over".<sup>12</sup> We support justice legislation that seeks redemption and reaches the depths of the human person through restorative means. We agree that sometimes isolation and segregation can temporarily dilute radicalisation and crime syndication – but isolation cannot and should not be indefinite. We have an opportunity to reach and address the root cause that necessitates crime ideology from forming in the first instance. We must consider that even those sentenced to life imprisonment are receptive to rehabilitation, reconciliation, and redemption (we state this because New Zealand has only issued a life sentence without parole (review) once, for the Christchurch Mosque shootings). The question is whether emphasis is being placed on the right focuses within this Bill.

Prisoners are already “doing time”. Through this Amendment Bill we have the opportunity to shape a Corrections system that reflects dignity, hope, and the possibility of renewing values central to both Catholic Social Teaching and a just society. We hope our recommendations have provided further dimension to how meaningful human contact could be achieved, and we look forward to following the progression of this Bill in its efforts to initiate humane and concrete change to the Corrections system.

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<sup>12</sup> Vatican News. (2026, April 22). *Pope at Bata Prison: “No one is excluded from God’s love.”*  
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2026-04/pope-leo-xiv-prison-equatorial-guinea-bata-address.html>