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COALITION TO END SUSPENDED SENTENCES

A Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition Government will restore justice to sentencing and help ensure appropriate penalties by abolishing suspended sentences.

Suspended sentences are part of Labor's soft-on-crime approach, which pretends that an offender is serving a term of imprisonment, when in fact they are living free in the community.

As a consequence many offenders actually incur no punishment whatsoever. They are not subject to any restrictions, community service obligations or reporting requirements.

Many of those released on suspended sentences go straight back to committing further crime.

Labor's failure to act decisively on suspended sentences simply confirms its soft-on-crime attitude.

The time for delay is over. Violent crime in our community is reaching record levels and the Brumby Government's response has failed, so a clear message must be sent to all Victorians that there will be zero tolerance of violence, criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

A Coalition Government will legislate to abolish suspended sentences upon coming to office. Alternative sentences are already available to the courts, and the abolition of suspended sentences should not be held up any longer.

If a court considers an offender should be released into the community, the court should say so openly, and sentence the offender to an intensive correction order or a community-based order. Otherwise, the offender should be serving a prison sentence in prison.

Labor's failure to end suspended sentences for serious offences means that perpetrators of crimes such as arson, drug trafficking and aggravated burglary remain eligible for suspended sentencing.

Labor's own Sentencing Advisory Council (SAC) recommended in 2005 that all suspended sentences be abolished, but the SAC was then forced to

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recommend postponement due to Labor's failure to implement other recommended changes.

In 2006, Labor purported to abolish suspended sentences for serious offences, but left an opened-ended and undefined "exceptional circumstances" clause in legislation, undermining its effect.

The Liberal Party and The Nationals proposed an amendment to close this loophole, but Labor rejected our amendment.

The Chair of the Sentencing Advisory Council himself, Professor Arie Freiberg, was reported in March last year as confirming that Labor's 2006 laws were not working as intended.

Victorians have suffered the consequences of this Labor neglect for long enough. The Liberal Nationals Coalition will deliver long-overdue legislative reform to restore honesty in sentencing.

These changes will further improve Victoria's sentencing laws alongside other reforms previously announced by the Coalition, such as the two year licensed premises ban for perpetrators of drunken violence.