

Chief Ombudsman continues to monitor treatment of detainees

2 April 2020

Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier says all New Zealanders have the right to be treated fairly during the COVID-19 emergency including those under lock and key.

“My role as an independent watchdog will continue during the lockdown period and beyond,” he says. “I will be making sure people are still being treated humanely and New Zealand’s international obligations are being met throughout this crisis.”

The Chief Ombudsman is responsible for examining and monitoring the treatment and conditions of people detained in prisons and court facilities, immigration detention centres, secure health and disability facilities, and child protection and youth justice residences.

“People can be held in detention for a variety of reasons. They may be very unwell, have broken a law, or it may be a way to keep themselves or others safe.”

“I respect that each facility has a responsibility to do as much as they can to protect detained people, staff, and others, from contracting or spreading infection during the pandemic.”

“While some restrictions to detention regimes may be justified for health and safety reasons, I must continue to independently verify that these protections are not compromising people’s basic rights.”

Mr Boshier says he is reviewing his OPCAT inspection programme in light of the COVID-19 actions taken by the government.

“I am in discussions with the Ministry of Justice and other agencies about how I continue my inspection and monitoring of places of detention during the emergency. I will be adjusting my inspection programme and approach accordingly and expect to be able to comment in more detail about this next week.”

“For me, it is about striking the right balance. I need to make sure any inspection or monitoring is carried out safely during the pandemic while at the same time, I need to make sure my oversight of these facilities is robust,” Mr Boshier says.

Mr Boshier is responding to this afternoon's statement from Chief Human Rights Commissioner, Paul Hunt, who has asked the government to ensure the rights of people it is holding, for detention purposes, are respected in its response to COVID-19.

ENDS

Contact Mark Torley, Manager Communications, on 027 2755733.

More information about the Chief Ombudsman's monitoring role at:

www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/what-we-can-help/monitoring-places-detention.