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Media release

Vinnies oppose Move-on Orders legislation

The Society of St Vincent de Paul has added its voice in strong opposition to the Government's Move-On Orders legislation.

If enacted, the Summary Offences (Move-on Orders) Amendment Bill would give police nationwide powers to issue move-on orders for rough sleeping, begging, and disorderly behaviour.

Under the proposed legislation, rough sleepers who fail to comply with police move on orders face arrest, a fine of up to \$2,000, or up to three months in prison. These measures can be taken against individuals as young as 14.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul Society presented its arguments in a written submission and in an oral submission on July 22 to the Justice Select Committee.

In an oral submission Society President Gerry Stevens said the Bill “is unnecessary and does nothing to address the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping. Passing this Bill will only make matters worse for people who are already at the extreme end of vulnerability.”

Gerry said there were already laws in place to deal with disorderly and disruptive behaviour.

“The new categories in this Bill which are listed as justifying ‘move on’ orders are rough sleeping and begging. These activities, however disturbing they may be for passers-by, are not offences. We know from our own experience that rough sleepers and beggars – who are not otherwise breaking the law – pose no threat to the safety of passers-by.

“They are not engaged in criminal activity. They are not intimidating people or engaging in disruptive behaviour. All they are doing is living the life of the desperate who have nowhere else to go.”

“It is nonsense to suggest the Bill is necessary to restore law and order to keep New Zealanders safe.”

Gerry Stevens said the Bill is an attack on persons who are in need and does nothing to assist their need. It simply removes the person from public gaze, out of sight, out of mind.

“It is a huge irony that our members can stand on the street in the CBD and request money from the public for the poor but a poor person begging there is likely to receive a move-on order.”

Criminalising rough sleepers is a very misguided response to a complex social issue, said Gerry.

“It is well known the answer lies in more emergency accommodation, more social housing and better access to health and addiction services. There is no easy fix to this, least of all passing the problem on to the Police to deal with.”

Ends

For further comment:

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