

## How to Use This Document

This document is for people with the power to act – politicians, media, academics, advocates. It is not a complaint. It is a plan backed by evidence, with a human story at its centre (shared separately, with consent), and a clear path from where we are to where the evidence says we should be.

## Step 1: Tell the Story

### Why the Story Matters

The Australian justice system costs \$32 billion per year and fails 45% of the time. That statistic has been published, presented, and ignored for decades.

Statistics don't change systems. People do. And people don't move for numbers – they move when they can see themselves in someone else's pain.

There is a woman in Western Australia whose daughter drowned. She performed CPR under direction from emergency services. The state investigated and cleared her of any wrongdoing. Then a police officer, months later, asked her to relive the worst moment of her life. When her trauma response made it impossible for her to speak – when she put her head down and covered her ears – the officer read her grief as disrespect and charged her on the spot.

She was already cleared. She was charged anyway. What followed was a cascade of systemic failure: three days without bail, placement in the care of a family member who had abused her, a misdiagnosis in a mental health ward driven by that same abuser's narrative, forced medication with suicidal ideation as a known side effect, and a legal battle to fight a charge that should never have existed.

Her full story exists in a separate document. It is hers. She controls it. If she consents to share it, it becomes the centrepiece of this campaign – because no one who reads it and has children can look away.

## What We Need

A politician – ideally **Senator David Shoebridge** (Greens, justice portfolio, Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee) or **Senator Lidia Thorpe** (independent, justice and accountability) – to tell her story in parliament, with her consent, so it enters the public record and the national conversation.

A media outlet – ideally **Four Corners** (ABC) or **Background Briefing** (ABC Radio National) – to investigate and tell the story with the depth it deserves. Not a tabloid piece. An investigation that connects one woman's experience to the systemic evidence.

## Why These People

PERSON / OUTLET	WHY THEM
Senator David Shoebridge	Greens justice spokesperson. Sits on Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee. Can refer an inquiry. Has championed wrongful conviction cases.
Senator Lidia Thorpe	Independent. Vocal on police accountability and institutional abuse. Will not soften the story for political comfort.
Four Corners (ABC)	The program that changes things in Australia. Carly Hennessy investigation led to Royal Commission into institutional abuse.
Background Briefing (ABC RN)	Long-form investigative. Takes stories other outlets won't touch.

## How to Approach Them

Do not mass-email. Do not send the document cold.

1. Contact the politician's office by phone. Ask for the justice policy adviser. Say: "I have a documented case and peer-reviewed evidence showing credibility assessment tools used in Australian courts are 54%

accurate. The case involves a grieving mother charged after a trauma response was misread as disrespect. Can I send a brief to the adviser?"

1. Contact Four Corners via [fourcorners@abc.net.au](mailto:fourcorners@abc.net.au). Subject line: "Evidence: credibility assessment in Australian courts is 54% accurate – documented case." Keep the email to 5 sentences. Offer the document. Don't attach it unsolicited.
1. Wait for a response before sending anything. Let them come to the story. People engage with what they choose to look at, not what's pushed on them.

## Step 2: The Common Sense System

### What Needs to Change (and Why No One Can Argue Against It)

Every reform below follows one principle: **if the evidence says the current approach doesn't work, stop doing it.**

#### 2.1 Trauma-Informed Police Training

##### The problem:

- 97% of prisoners have at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). The general population rate is 61%.
- 75% of people with substance use disorders have trauma histories.
- Drug use is a key driver of crime. Drug use is massively overrepresented in trauma survivors. Therefore, police are constantly interacting with traumatised people – and are not trained to recognise it.
- Trauma responses (silence, withdrawal, freezing, covering ears, inability to make eye contact) are the same behaviours police are trained to read as deception or disrespect.

- The accuracy of human credibility assessment is 54.1%. Officers are making life-altering decisions based on tools that perform 4% better than a coin flip.
- Grief responses (bereaved parents, sudden death witnesses)
- Neurodiversity (autism, FND, ADHD – conditions that affect communication under stress)
- Substance-affected individuals (recognising withdrawal, intoxication, and trauma overlap)
- De-escalation before assessment (you cannot assess someone's truthfulness while their nervous system is in fight-flight-freeze)

**The evidence:**

- Queensland Police Service evaluated trauma-informed training (ISACURE course) for sexual assault investigators – found improved case outcomes and reduced victim dropout
- UK College of Policing is co-creating trauma-informed frameworks with communities
- US research (CNA): victim-centred, trauma-informed policing "helps victims and police while reducing crime"

**The unarguable framing:**

"We're not asking officers to be social workers. We're asking them to be accurate. The current tools are 54% accurate. That means officers are making wrong calls nearly half the time. Training fixes that."

## 2.2 Independent Review of Trauma-Context Charges

**The problem:**

When a charge is laid during or immediately after a visible trauma response – a bereaved parent unable to speak, a domestic violence survivor dissociating, a person with PTSD freezing – the charging officer's judgment is compromised by the same 54.1% accuracy problem.

**The change:**

Any charge laid during or immediately after a documented trauma response must be independently reviewed by a senior officer who was not present at the interaction, within 48 hours.

**The unarguable framing:**

"We already review use-of-force incidents. This is the same principle – an independent check on a high-stakes decision made under pressure."

## **2.3 Bail Safety: No Placement with Known Abusers**

### **The problem:**

The current bail system can place accused persons in the care of family members without adequate screening for abuse history. A sexual assault survivor can be placed in the custody of her abuser because he filled in the paperwork.

### **The change:**

Bail assessments must include a mandatory screening question: does the proposed responsible person have any documented history of abuse, family violence orders, or child protection involvement relating to the accused? If yes, alternative arrangements must be made.

### **The unarguable framing:**

"This isn't about being soft on crime. This is about not handing a vulnerable person to someone who has already harmed them. We screen foster carers. We should screen bail supervisors."

## **2.4 Clinical Assessment Independence**

### **The problem:**

When a person is detained in a mental health facility, their diagnosis can be influenced by information provided by family members who may have conflicts of interest – including abusers who benefit from the person being labelled mentally ill.

### **The change:**

Clinical assessments of detained individuals must not rely on uncorroborated family-provided information as a primary diagnostic input. Where family-provided information is used, the clinician must document independent corroboration.

### **The unarguable framing:**

"We require two forms of ID to open a bank account. We should require more than one person's word to diagnose someone with a psychiatric condition while they're locked in a facility."

## **2.5 Drug Diversion: Treat the Trauma, Not the Symptom**

### **The problem:**

- People with an ACE score of 5+ are 7-10x more likely to use illegal drugs
- People with an ACE score of 4 are 700% more likely to become alcoholics
- 75% of people in addiction treatment have trauma histories
- We spend billions arresting, prosecuting, and imprisoning people for drug offences that are, in the majority of cases, a downstream symptom of childhood trauma

### **The change:**

Expand police discretion to divert drug-affected individuals to treatment rather than prosecution (NZ's Misuse of Drugs Amendment model). Expand therapeutic drug courts nationally (Australia already has them in most states – they're just underfunded).

### **The evidence:**

- NZ's Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court: graduates 50% less likely to reoffend at 1 year, 86% less at 12 months post-treatment
- NSW MERIT program: demonstrated reductions in reoffending for drug-affected defendants diverted to treatment
- Bourke Justice Reinvestment: reoffending down 18%, assaults down 39%

### **The unarguable framing:**

"Drug courts cost less than prison and produce half the reoffending. We already have them. We just won't fund them."

## 2.6 Credibility Assessment Disclosure

### The problem:

Juries are never told that the credibility assessment tools used throughout the trial – by police, prosecutors, and the jury themselves – have a peer-reviewed accuracy rate of 54.1%.

### The change:

Courts should be required to include in jury directions a disclosure that behavioural credibility assessment has a documented accuracy rate of 54.1%, and that the behavioural cues commonly associated with deception (gaze aversion, fidgeting, speech hesitation) have no reliable scientific basis.

### The unarguable framing:

"If a forensic lab told you their DNA test was 54% accurate, you'd throw it out. We're asking juries to make the same call about credibility evidence – with the same information."

---

---

## Step 3: How We Erode the Antiquated System

### The Nordic Lesson: Incremental, Not Revolutionary

Norway's recidivism was **60-70%** in the 1980s. They didn't pass one big law. They made approximately **25 small changes over 30 years**, each too minor to trigger political backlash. Their recidivism is now **20%**.

But we don't have 30 years. So we compress the timeline by targeting **pressure points** – the places where one change forces others.

### The Erosion Strategy

**Layer 1: Create the paper trail (Months 1-3)**

ACTION	WHO	EFFECT
Submit evidence to ALRC	You	Creates formal record. ALRC must acknowledge.
Submit to WA Inspector of Custodial Services	You	Falls within their mandate. Must respond.
Submit to Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee	Shoebridge's office	Can trigger formal inquiry.
File complaint with WA Equal Opportunity Commission	Friend (if consenting)	Disability discrimination — FND/autism misread as deception.

Each submission cites the same research. Each body that acknowledges it creates a thread that connects to the others. A Senate inquiry can reference ALRC submissions. Media can reference the Senate inquiry. Momentum builds.

## Layer 2: Build the expert coalition (Months 2-6)

ACADEMIC	INSTITUTION	WHY THEY'D ENGAGE
Prof Eileen Baldry	UNSW	Leading researcher on disability and criminal justice. This is her exact field.
Prof Gary Edmond	UNSW	Forensic evidence reliability. Has published on unreliable evidence being used in courts.
Prof David Hamer	University of Sydney	Evidence law, wrongful convictions.
Dr Robyn Blewer	Griffith University	Wrongful convictions research.

You don't need all of them. You need **one** to co-sign a submission or write an op-ed. One academic voice turns "someone wrote a document" into "a researcher at UNSW is raising concerns about credibility assessment accuracy in Australian courts."

### Layer 3: Point to what already works (Months 3-9)

Don't argue theory. Point to **Australian programs that already produce results:**

PROGRAM	LOCATION	RESULT
Bourke Justice Reinvestment	NSW	Reoffending down 18%, assaults down 39%
Koori Courts	VIC	Lower reoffending among Aboriginal defendants
MERIT Program	NSW	Treatment diversion for drug-affected defendants
Drug Courts	National (underfunded)	Consistently lower reoffending than standard courts
PACER	VIC	Police + mental health co-response — reduces unnecessary detention

The argument is not "copy Norway." The argument is "**scale what's already working here.**"

### Layer 4: Lock in the gains (Months 6-18)

NZ's critical lesson: **reform gains are fragile.** NZ achieved measurable progress from 2014-2021 – re-imprisonment dropped from 32% to 24%, iwi panels reduced reoffending harm by 22%. Then a new government reinstated Three Strikes and reversed almost everything.

The fix: don't rely on policy. Pursue **legislative change** that survives a change of government:

- Credibility assessment disclosure in jury directions (amend Evidence Act)
- Mandatory trauma-informed training (amend Police Act/regulations)
- Bail safety screening (amend Bail Act)
- Clinical assessment independence (amend Mental Health Act)

Legislation is harder to pass but harder to undo. Policy is easy to create and easy to kill.

## Step 4: The New System — With Evidence

### What the Evidence Says Works

APPROACH	EVIDENCE	SOURCE
Rehabilitation over punishment	Norway: recidivism dropped from 60-70% to 20%	Nordic Relapse Study
Indigenous-led diversion	NZ Te Pae Oranga: harm reduced 22-27%, 92% completion	NZ Police evaluation
Therapeutic drug courts	NZ AODTC: graduates 50-86% less likely to reoffend	NZ Ministry of Justice
Justice reinvestment	Bourke NSW: reoffending down 18%, assaults down 39%	Just Reinvest NSW
Police discretion for drugs	NZ Misuse of Drugs Amendment: health referral over prosecution	NZ Parliament
Mental health co-response	PACER (VIC): reduces unnecessary psychiatric detention	Victoria Police
Trauma-informed policing	QPS ISACURE training: improved case outcomes	Queensland Police Service
Restorative justice	NZ: referrals tripled after 2014 Sentencing Act amendment	NZ Ministry of Justice

### The Cost Argument

CURRENT SYSTEM	REFORMED SYSTEM
\$32 billion/year	Lower (fewer prisoners = lower costs)

45% recidivism	20-25% (Nordic benchmark)
~42,000 prisoners	Could be halved with diversion + treatment
~\$120,000/prisoner/year	Drug court costs ~\$20,000-30,000/participant/year

Norway spends more per prisoner (\$127,000/year) but has **far fewer prisoners** and far less reoffending. The total system cost is lower because people don't come back.

Australia already spends \$120,000 per prisoner per year for a system that fails nearly half the time. Drug courts cost a fraction and produce better outcomes. The maths is not complicated.

## The International Comparison

COUNTRY	APPROACH	RECIDIVISM	INCARCERATION RATE
Norway	Rehabilitation + normality principle	~20%	75 per 100,000
Finland	40-year incremental reform	~24-31%	57 per 100,000
New Zealand (2021)	Partial reform (now reversing)	~35% re-imprisoned	217 per 100,000
Australia	Punitive	~45%	167 per 100,000
USA	Punitive	~67%	531 per 100,000

Australia sits between NZ and the USA. The evidence says it doesn't have to. Every country above Australia on this list chose to change. The ones that committed to evidence-based reform got results. The ones that didn't – or that reversed course (NZ post-2023) – didn't.

## New Zealand: The Warning — What Happens When You Reverse Reform

New Zealand is the most important case study for Australia. Same legal system. Same indigenous overrepresentation crisis. And a government that tried reform, got results, then reversed it. The data on what happened next is damning.

**The reform period (2018-2021):**

- Prison population dropped from 10,820 to 7,702 – a 29% reduction
- Re-imprisonment dropped from 32% to 24%
- Maori imprisonment rate fell 30% (657 to 459 per 100,000)
- Iwi-led community panels reduced reoffending harm by 22-27%
- Drug court graduates reoffended 86% less in the first year

**The reversal (2023-2026) – after reinstating Three Strikes, toughening sentencing:**

INDICATOR	REFORM PEAK (2021)	POST-REVERSAL (2025-26)	DIRECTION
Prison population	7,702	11,000+ (all-time record)	+43% WORSE
Imprisonment rate	~150/100,000	187/100,000	+25% WORSE
Maori % of prisoners	50%	52-56%	WORSE
Remand (unconvicted) %	~20%	40-53%	DOUBLED
Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults	Lower	1,558/year (all-time record)	RECORD HIGH
Prisoner-on-staff assaults	Lower	1,080/year (all-time record)	RECORD HIGH
2-year reconviction rate	~52%	56.5%	WORSE
Rehab programme effectiveness	Programmes maintained	1-2.3% reduction	NEAR ZERO
Per-prisoner annual cost	Lower	\$201,408 NZD	RECORD HIGH

New prison construction budget	None needed	\$3.5+ billion NZD announced	BILLIONS SPENT
--------------------------------	-------------	------------------------------	----------------

### And here's the part that should end the argument:

The crime decline the NZ government is claiming credit for? The Ministry of Justice's own advice to ministers says it is a **continuation of the trend that was already happening under the reform approach**. The tough-on-crime policies hadn't even been implemented when the crime drop appeared in the data.

They reversed reform. Every indicator got worse. The one thing that got better – the crime decline – was already happening before they changed anything. In October 2025, the **UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture** formally urged New Zealand to reduce its prison population.

That is the future Australia is choosing if it stays on the current path. And it's the future Australia avoids if it follows the evidence instead.

**The NZ lesson in one sentence:** They proved reform works, proved reversal fails, and are now spending \$3.5 billion building prisons to house people at \$200,000 a year while their own rehabilitation programmes achieve a 1% reduction in reoffending.

## What the New System Looks Like

### Not a revolution. An upgrade.

1. Police interact with a traumatised person → Trained to recognise trauma responses. De-escalation before assessment. Discretion to divert to services instead of charging.
1. Someone is charged → Independent review if charge occurred during trauma response. Bail assessment screens for abuser relationships. Restorative justice referral considered.
1. Court proceedings → Jury told the accuracy rate of credibility assessment. Therapeutic court options for drug-related offences. Specialist courts for neurodiverse defendants.
1. Sentenced → Rehabilitation-focused custody. Education, employment training, trauma treatment. Community transition planning from day one.

1. Released → Housing support. Employment support. Addiction treatment continuity. Not released to homelessness and told not to reoffend.

None of this is theoretical. Every element exists in at least one Australian jurisdiction already. We're not asking anyone to invent something new. We're asking them to stop ignoring what works.

## The Timeline

WHEN	WHAT	WHO
Month 1	Get her consent. Refine the story document.	You + her
Month 1	Submit to ALRC and WA OICS	You
Month 1-2	Contact Shoebridge's office and one academic	You
Month 2-3	If Shoebridge engages: Senate question or committee referral	Shoebridge
Month 3	If academic engages: co-signed submission or op-ed	Academic partner
Month 3-4	Approach Four Corners with: submission on record + academic backing + Senate interest	You
Month 4-6	Media story runs. Public awareness. Political pressure.	Media + politicians
Month 6-12	Push for legislative amendments (Evidence Act, Police Act, Bail Act, Mental Health Act)	Coalition of supporters
Month 12-18	First legislative change passes. Others follow.	Parliament

---

## The Bottom Line

The system that did this to her costs \$32 billion a year. It fails 45% of the time. The tools it uses to assess whether someone is telling the truth are 54% accurate – four percent better than guessing. Every country that has replaced this approach with evidence-based alternatives has gotten better outcomes for less money.

We are not asking for compassion. We are not asking anyone to be soft on crime. We are asking the Australian justice system to be **accurate** – and to stop punishing people for grieving.

---

*This document is a campaign plan. The story at its centre belongs to one person. Nothing identifying is shared without her explicit consent.*