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Attending a funeral is hardly a junket

The recent debate in the Herald Sun about prisoners attending funerals shows that many people don't understand the importance of funerals and Sorry business to the Aboriginal community.

The Chairman of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Frank Guivarra, emphasises the significance of funerals to Aboriginal people. "The inability of Aboriginal prisoners to attend funerals punishes prisoners, their families, their extended families and the community."

"Even though these people have done wrong, prison shouldn't take the right away from people to say goodbye to their family. Attending the death of a family member is hardly a junket. It is the last connection people have to family."

Due to resourcing constraints, there have been instances of Aboriginal prisoners not being able to go to funerals. VALS supports the Bracks governments proposed legislation which will increase the possibility of prisoners attending funerals.

The Liberal's tough line on prisoners ignores Aboriginal people's cultural obligations to their family and community. It also ignores the financial hardships suffered by Aboriginal communities who often will be unable to afford to subsidise the prisoner's attendance at a funeral.

According to Mr Guivarra, "Upon release from prison, Aboriginal people can be stigmatised by their community for not coming to a funeral."

Victimisation of prisoners is hardly likely to reduce the incidence of crime. On the contrary, by further cutting prisoners off from their culture and community, it may directly increase the chances of prisoners reoffending upon release.

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