

23rd March 2026

Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Hobart TAS 700

New Tasmanian Youth Justice Facility

I am grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Public Works Committee in respect of the new Tasmanian Youth Justice Facility.

My submission are reflections on the New Tasmanian Youth Justice Facility Masterplan May 2025, being the most contemporaneous document I have available in respect of the facility and the physical location, structure etc. Page numbers refer to the most recent version available online.

My principle issue is that the document is very much framed in a way that reflects the perspective and aspirations of the designers, not the detainees who will be residing there. Whatever drive there is to improve therapeutic design and support, one cannot romanticise their way through a redesigned detention facility.

Design Rationale (page 19)

The principal issue with the Design Rationale is the reliance on external adult vernacular and perspective to demonstrate its trauma-informed and therapeutic qualities. The problem with this is that the perception of children and young people detained may be significantly different.

It is not clear how the description of 'the country vernacular, evoking the aesthetic of the Georgian influence' is expected to translate to the meaning and comprehension of any young person due to be detained.

Conversely, simplified terms do not mean simplified manifestation. Describing the facility as 'Small and Homelike' is very much an appeal to the intention, not the final design as it will be interpreted by detainees. However, the temptation will be to present the facility itself in such glowing, but uncritical, terms, in order to justify the original rationale. Describing a facility as 'home-like' depends very much on the experience one has of home, and what ideals they hold.

These issues are not necessarily practical concerns in the way of physical building design or construction, but in principle terms of emotional impact on detainees, and the social construction of the facility, they could be significantly detrimental.

In particular, I remain concerned about the implications of subjective interpretation informing perception from an agency point of view, rather than detainee. This might be seen in terms of discounting a young person's negative emotional response to the facility environment, because the determination has been made about how it is meant to be perceived. For

example, 'small' might be interpreted as 'oppressive' by a detainee, but because the word 'small' is linked with 'home-like' it might be assumed to mean 'comfortable'. This could lead to an institutional prejudice against negative viewpoints that leads to victim-blaming because a detainee is 'unable' to see the facility in the way that it was designed to be.

This is analogous to a situation that can occur in care and protection settings, where the agency perspective of 'safe' differs from the child's perspective, leading to issues about a proposed placement and refusal. The agency rarely reassesses its own assumptions, and instead relies on problematic terms like 'self-selecting' to justify its rationale.

For this reason, it would be prudent to incorporate the subjective quality of the rationale, and to include interpretative elements from children and young people (particularly those with experience of intervention by youth justice) that have the opportunity to review the plans. In other words, ask children and young people what the facility plans remind them of, what do they think, and what words would they use? Incorporating that description would have the benefit of minimising risk of assumptions entering the perceptions of the facility once constructed.

Rural Area Opportunities (page 24)

The masterplan needs to stand on its own merit, and what can be reasonably included in the assumptions or planning. Referencing 'opportunities to integrate and establish meaningful connection with these rural programs' is ambiguous, and without certainty that such connection is established makes this a hollow perspective. Promising what might not be deliverable undermines the confidence of the facility, if the arguments in favour of the masterplan are dependent on this embedded ambiguity.

Entry Building (page 26)

Any detention facility will struggle to convey a sense of being 'welcoming and attractive'. This is not a criticism of the principles of such facilities, it is simply a reality. The whole point of detention facilities is to enable correctional work that generates a reluctance to return. At the same time, a basic sense of being confined or contained, even in a relatively benign-looking environment, is not going to enhance a detainees' perception of a facility. In other words, the natural characteristics of a detention facility, physical and emotional, prevent the application of being welcoming and attractive.

The point here is that again assumptions are being baked into the final design, with the risk that the final design will be understood by its operators as the only rational interpretation of the design. If there is resistance from detainees to accepting this perception (a plausible risk), it can lead to misunderstandings in believing that the fault lies with the detainee, not the underlying assumptions.

The intent needs to be made plainer, and incorporate the plausible alternative interpretations that may arise, however problematic these may be to the public presentation of the facility.

Visitor Centre + Café (page 30)

If the café is intended to include a function as a training kitchen then it is not a café; it will be a training kitchen that people can visit.

Applying a dual-role creates a complication when using a term such as 'informal' for gathering young people, staff and visitors. The young people will also have experienced the site as formal if it is used for training. How will the distinction between the rules/expectations, which will presumably apply for formal activities in the café/kitchen, be explained compared to the more informal style at other times?

For neurodivergent young people, it could be especially complicated trying to develop separate routines to account for a location that is physically the same, but for which the social context changes.

It is not clear what 'potential employment connections' is meant to represent in terms of practical undertaking, especially for any detainees from the North or North-West of the state. There is often a simplistic notion of employment equalling social enhancement and legitimacy, but in the context of children and young people, particularly those in conflict with the law, the expectations of this can be significantly overstated.

Houses (page 34)

It is not clear how the outside enclosure does not reinforce the sense of being in an institution, undermining the attempt at creating a 'homelike' feel. The presence of netting represents an alternative form of barrier; vertical rather than horizontal. It would be useful to understand how this type of restriction is considered in similar facilities elsewhere.

The multi-purpose room generates a difficulty in that it is merging some varied and potentially complex uses. For example, health uses will potentially require some equipment or means to use equipment, for physical considerations. Will any equipment remain there, thus undermining the agile nature of the environment? Health can encompass a broad spectrum of consultation and treatment, which is complicated enough, without also being a room for other disciplines/purposes.

Merging may risk associating specific experiences or recollections with other tasks that ideally would be kept separate. For example, having a particularly intensive period of counselling, but using the same physical space for education at a later time, which becomes potentially trauma-inducing. How might young people be safeguarded from these types of physical associations?

What is the purpose of the separate staff workspace in this context? How is it envisaged that the young people might access staff in this workplace? Wouldn't this undermine the sense of "ownership" for the houses, in that it will be a reminder that the young people are not ultimately custodians of their own accommodation? I ask these questions because fundamentally this is no different to having a staff/guard office on a prison block, however 'home-like' the setting.

Site infrastructure (page 43)

It is not clear why solar power has been discounted as an option for supplementing power at the site. With so many buildings present, there is surely the ability to add panels to the roofs. Furthermore, a cover for the parking area could serve a purpose of both protecting from the elements, and also attaching further panels.

What are the limitations to adding EV charging points at the car park?

Is a diesel generator the only viable option for support power, and not a battery system? Given current global circumstances, it seems more prudent than ever to consider reliance on fossil fuel energy.

Conclusion

My primary concern is the manner in which the agency wording might betray agency mentality. This is not simply a case of rudimentary semantics over wording. It is about the risk of the environmental setting becoming a form of institutional inertia in terms of therapeutic delivery, and leading to a perverse outcome from the one intended.

I trust this feedback will be useful.

Yours faithfully,

Jack Davenport