

Press Statement

4 December 2014 - Immediate Release

Probation Union Anger as Secretary of State Ignores Dangers

Today Chris Grayling the Secretary of State for Justice has announced that he will proceed to the award of contracts for the Probation Service despite evidence that it is unsafe to do so. Napo, the trade union and professional association for probation staff has repeatedly provided evidence to the Secretary of State that his newly tested reforms are placing the public at risk and believes he is ignoring the unions concerns to pursue an ideological plan that is running to an election timetable rather than in the public interest.

Napo has issued Judicial Review proceedings against Mr Grayling which are due to be heard in the High Court on 10th December. The union's argument is that the reforms are unsafe and the Secretary of State should not proceed to the next stage (awarding then signing contracts to preferred bidders) until it is safe to do so and the huge flaws in the system such as staff shortages (through increasing sickness since reforms were introduced in June - up over 60 % in space of 4 months), inadequate IT systems and the loss of offender records have been resolved.

Ian Lawrence, Napo General Secretary, said: "we cannot believe that in the face of the evidence, Grayling is still planning to proceed. His own testing processes have highlighted that there are still significant areas that need to be improved to make these plans anywhere near safe. To award contracts now is irresponsible and clear evidence that this is purely about ideology and not about public safety. He continues to ignore the expertise of our members who are absolutely clear that the service is currently in chaos and that handing over the management of offenders to the private sector at this time represents a danger to the public."

Napo understands that the contracts are due to be signed off later this month with new providers taking control in February 2015. 'Poison pill' compensation clauses in the contracts mean that they cannot be cancelled by incoming governments without the tax payer having to fork out 10 years' worth of profit in compensation.

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