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MEDIA RELEASE

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Extended use of Symonston Correctional Centre

Minister for Justice, Shane Rattenbury, today announced that ACT Corrective Services will move additional detainees to the Symonston Correctional Facility as a temporary measure in response to continuing and increasing accommodation pressures at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).

"I had previously indicated that the number of detainees to be moved to the Symonston Facility would not exceed 22, however the number of detainees in full time custody has continued to rise in recent weeks and the AMC is again at capacity," said Mr Rattenbury.

"Over the past few days ACTCS has held up to 374 detainees of varying legal status. These are the highest numbers of detainees ever recorded. While some detainees were held on remand over the weekend and some have since been released, the population pressures are not easing.

"The decision to move more detainees to Symonston has not been taken lightly. However for the safety of staff, detainees and the good order of the ACT's correctional facilities it is important that we maintain manageable numbers within the AMC and this means moving additional detainees today.

"At this stage we are making an additional 8 beds available at Symonston.

"Rapidly growing prison numbers are a problem facing all jurisdictions. I was at a Corrections Ministers conference last week and it is fair to say that each Minister expressed a growing need to respond to these unprecedented population pressures with new and jurisdictionally appropriate strategies - from recommissioning old closed jails, to installing new modified shipping containers.

"As with the detainees who have already been moved to Symonston, all additional detainees will be individually assessed, taking into consideration a range of factors including health needs and compliance within the AMC. Only those who are deemed to pose a low risk will be accommodated there.

"Residents can be assured that the Symonston Correctional Facility is a secure facility with a secure perimeter and CCTV surveillance and its use as a full time custody option is a temporary measure.

"The facility will be used temporarily while ACT Corrective Services awaits the completion of additional accommodation units currently in construction within the AMC campus, with the first of those units expected to become available in the second half of 2015. The full expansion is due for completion in mid 2016.

In April this year ACT Corrective Services notified local residents in the area via mail that the Symonston facility may be used to accommodate detainees on a full time basis.

Statement ends

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