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Media Release

Psychologists condemn un-informed and ineffective 'Boot Camp' policy.

The New Zealand Psychological Society is alarmed at the National Party's latest plan titled "combatting youth offending" which focuses on using power and control to address what they see as a rise in youth crime. We are concerned with the plan to use coercive methods to 'target serious repeat offenders', the creation of young offender military academies; and backing police to tackle gangs.

The scientific literature condemns the practice of 'boot camps', and research on police racism and bias shows that Māori and Pacific youth are overwhelmingly targeted for state and police 'intervention'. Psychologists working in the criminal justice system have highlighted research that shows boot camp style interventions are not only ineffective in stopping crime, but instead increase violent crime, at a high cost.

Steps must instead be taken to provide community and family-centred services across the lifespan that provide wellbeing and social cohesion. Support in schools and in homes are needed, not military training camps. A poorly thought-out plan will only lead to further systemic inequities. Research provided this year shows that the crime rate across the country is lower than previous years, yet the media have highlighted the incidence of certain crimes, while overlooking the abundance of wellbeing centred interventions.

"We agree that communities should be empowered to break the cycle of offending, however we must be informed by what the evidence suggests does and doesn't have a positive impact. We must also ensure we are addressing underlying issues which contribute to these negative cycles, such as through increased efforts to end poverty, systemic racism, inequities and health disparities" said Tania Anstiss, President of the NZ Psychological Society, "Additional support is needed to provide culturally-responsive education, mental health, drug and alcohol services as a response to intergenerational trauma brought on by the types of strategy that National plans to impose."

While Aotearoa is still to address the impact of State Abuse towards our most vulnerable, forced military style boot camps are draconian, oppressive, and ineffective. In years to come, should this policy be implemented, our children, their families and society will be left to deal with the fall out.

ENDS

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About the New Zealand Psychological Society

The New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPsS) is the largest professional association for psychologists in New Zealand. It has around 2300 members, including students, and aims to improve individual and community wellbeing by representing, promoting and advancing the scientific discipline and practice of psychology.