

Union stymies jail needle bid

By Bianca Hall and Noel Towell

Chief Minister Katy Gallagher has acknowledged her plan to introduce a needle-and-syringe program at the Alexander Maconochie Centre may never see the light of day.

Ms Gallagher held a lengthy meeting yesterday with delegates from the prison guards' union, the Community and Public Sector Union yesterday.

The union delegates left Ms Gallagher in no doubt their members would block the proposal at every step - even if the Government made a needle-and-syringe program a legal requirement.

Afterwards Ms Gallagher, who supports a program on public health grounds, said she now believed nothing would change the guards' opposition to the plan.



STALLED: Chief Minister Katy Gallagher's proposal has met opposition from the CPSU.

"I'm not going to just steamroll something through because I have a public health opinion if I can't actually operationalise it in a jail, and if the opposition within that jail is of such a strength that it would have a detrimental effect on staff and prisoners," the Chief Minister said.

"I think it's getting increasingly hard to find that middle ground. I think it creates some real difficulties. I'm not prepared to shut the

door on it at this stage but I think the road's a bit harder."

In July former health minister Michael Moore presented a position paper to the Government outlining how a needle-and-syringe program could be introduced at the centre.

Aware of prison guards' opposition, Mr Moore's preferred option was for a supervised injecting facility to be established in the health centre.

But yesterday, the CPSU was clear it would not back a needle program at the jail under any circumstances.

It says allowing illicit drugs to be legally used inside the prison would undermine rehabilitation efforts, put staff at risk and make corrections staff complicit in illegal behaviour.

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"Facilitating drug use in their workplace is going to undermine safety, that's the key point," secretary Vince McDevitt said.

"One [concern] is of course the idea that officers become complicit in escorting people, presumably holding illegal substances, into this unsupervised area which kind of equates to an injecting room, and behind closed doors without surveillance and then tasked with escorting the, presumably drug-affected person back to their cell." In its submission to the Government, the CPSU says it is neither sensible nor appropriate to restrict or hinder prison officers from preventing drugs being sold or used within the prison. "To do so would introduce a level of lawlessness that would clearly

undermine the safety, security and good order of the AMC.

"This proposed arrangement would also force custodial officers into the untenable position of being complicit in illegal activity and jeopardising the safety of staff and prisoners."

Mr McDevitt said the union would not pursue industrial tactics to oppose the program - at least for now. "We will hold off, we'll just adopt a holding position, until such time as the Government responds."

The Canberra Liberals welcomed the development, saying it was clear a needle-exchange program would put staff and prisoners at risk.

"The Canberra Liberals believe that a needle exchange will not only increase risk to staff and prisoners, but will lead to increased drug use at the prison," Opposition Corrections spokesman Jeremy Hanson said.

Cush and Assted Mr Jack-iv escape. "My

excessive speed, but the judge reflected the argument and found the company was "wholly responsible for the harm caused to Mr Jackson".

ROLLOVER: The scene of the accident in which Donald Jackson was serious



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But the pressure does not appear to be Mr Barr, who insisted yesterday that tea one of the best deals in the country.

He said ACT teachers already had teaching days, lower class sizes and 20 cent more government spending per student than other jurisdictions.

"If the requirement is that we have conditions and the highest wages, it means ACT residents would pay the highest of anyone in the country."

He pointed out the current offer includes a 30 per cent pay rise for the capital classroom teachers, bringing them to a salary of \$100,000, and included a system progression rates.

The increased advancement would graduates progressing at almost twice the rate.

"You could get to the top of the teaching structure within five years rather than eight," he said. "At the moment the incentive is at all."