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Victoria's Tougher Bail Laws and Childcare Failures Spark Debate

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The Victorian government, led by Premier Jacinta Allan, is set to tighten bail laws again, targeting repeat offenders, while facing fierce criticism over a childcare sector in disarray. As parliament resumes, new legislation will make it harder for serious offenders to secure bail, but the government's handling of childcare safety scandals has drawn sharp rebukes from critics, who argue it's dodging accountability.

The Allan government's latest bail reforms aim to curb repeat offending, particularly for serious crimes like robbery and home invasions. Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny

emphasized, “The data tells us that certain types of serious offences are more likely to be repeated by people out on bail”. The changes introduce a “second strike rule,” requiring courts to deny bail unless it’s highly likely the accused won’t reoffend. This follows earlier reforms branded as Australia’s “toughest bail laws,” yet critics, including community legal groups, warn they disproportionately harm vulnerable groups, including youth, and fail to address crime’s root causes. The government’s own data predicts a surge in remand numbers, straining prison resources further.

Meanwhile, the childcare sector’s crisis has erupted into public view, fueled by allegations against worker Joshua Dale Brown, charged with over 70 child sex abuse offences across multiple centres. The Victorian Greens, led by Anasina Gray-Barberio, are pushing for a parliamentary inquiry into childcare regulators, slamming the government’s rapid review as a “whitewash” designed to shield Labor from scrutiny. “Labor’s narrow review avoids scrutiny of their own regulation,” Gray-Barberio stated. The government’s failure to meet a deadline for releasing enforcement records against childcare operators has only deepened distrust, with the Greens arguing it prioritizes political damage control over child safety.

Premier Allan’s administration defends its response, pointing to plans for a childcare worker register and bans on personal devices in centres. Yet, critics argue these measures are too little, too late, with Professor Gabrielle Meagher noting the need for transparency to understand how billions in subsidies are managed. As Victoria grapples with these dual challenges, the government’s tough-on-crime stance and childcare missteps risk alienating voters who demand both safety and accountability.