

We do lock them away

Bail justice 'scapegoats'

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BAIL justices have warned there will be more "people running around pinching cars and doing house-jackings" if they are replaced by magistrates.

The state's bail justices said they took a tougher approach than magistrates and any move to replace them would result in a weaker bail system.

The Andrews Government is reviewing the bail system in the wake of the Bourke St tragedy, and has set up a "night court" for magistrates to hear bail requests from violent suspects after hours.

Bail justices have come under the microscope since one released Dimitrios Gargasoulas on bail a week before he allegedly mowed down dozens of people a fortnight ago.

But Peter Wadeson, a bail justice of 25 years, said statistics showed the volunteer justices remanded a far greater percentage of suspects.

The former police senior sergeant said bail justices refused bail to about 85 per cent of alleged criminals who came before them, only to see magistrates bailing more than three-quarters of them days later.

Mr Wadeson urged the government to think carefully

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before replacing bail justices with magistrates.

"I would say we would see a lot more people running around pinching cars and doing house-jackings," Mr Wadeson said.

"Statistics will show that bail justices remand a huge volume of cases, and the reality of what happens when magistrates hear the cases in full.

"Every one must bear in mind that what we hear is only a summary, and of course the court has the benefit of time and hearing a much broader degree of evidence."

The state's bail justices met with shadow attorney-general John Pesutto yesterday to air their frustrations at being the scapegoats. Following the meeting, Mr Pesutto said the problem was with the bail system and not bail justices.

"Many of the bail justices ... were expressing their deep frustration that they would often remand somebody, only to find that on the Monday morning the person they remanded is back out on the streets," Mr Pesutto said.

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