

Dakota Pearce-Riley, you plead guilty to arson. In November 2025 you were living in a house in Youngtown which you leased from Homes Tasmania. You had been there for about three years. Just before 8 am on 1 November 2025, after earlier removing at least some of your personal possessions into the carport, you set fire to the house by lighting a mattress in a rear bedroom. The fire was quickly noticed by a neighbour. It was extinguished by Tasmania Fire Service soon afterwards, but not before the rear of the house was extensively damaged by the fire and the rest of the house was damaged by smoke and water. It remains uninhabitable. The cost of repairs is yet to be determined but is likely to be considerable.

You returned to the property just over a week later to collect items of yours and you admitted what you had done to a neighbour. You were arrested but made no admissions to the police.

You are aged 30. During your formative years you faced considerable difficulty and deprivation. In your early teenage years you suffered shocking abuse perpetrated by your father, a person of considerable criminality. Since then you have struggled with mental health problems and drug use. You are a long time methylamphetamine user. Your education continued only to grade 10 when it was interrupted by the birth of your first child. You now have four children. Despite your problems, your criminal record is not a bad one until, in late 2023 your drug use escalated into a deep addiction. In part, this arose from your concern about your father's imminent release from prison. Your children were removed from your care in January 2024. The decline is reflected in your record. From late 2023 and during 2024 and 2025 you began committing offences including breaches of bail, firearm offences, possession of methylamphetamine and GHB, stealing, drug related driving offences and other anti-social offending. Most of these offences were committed before this crime and, thus, it is an aggravating factor that at the time you were on bail. You were arrested on 13 November 2025 and kept in custody for a day. You were remanded again on 21 January 2026 and you have been in custody since then. On 23 March 2026 you were sentenced by a magistrate for all those other offences to imprisonment for four months wholly suspended for 12 months.

You are entitled to mitigation from your plea of guilty. It was entered at an early stage. It not only indicates an acceptance of responsibility and a wish to facilitate justice, it also avoids the need for a trial at a time when there is considerable demand on the resources of the court and the prosecuting authorities. You cannot explain why you committed this crime. You had nothing to gain and were not trying to engineer a move from your home. You can only attribute it to your disordered thinking at the time, but there is no evidence of any causative link between a mental health condition and the crime. Use of illicit drugs is not mitigating. This is the longest you have spent in custody and you have found it onerous. You have maintained abstinence from drugs and you have been taking steps to arrange for your admission into a residential rehabilitation facility on your release.

All of that must be balanced against the seriousness of the crime of arson. It is all too easy to commit. The risk it poses and the impact can be considerable. Although there was no extensive planning and no accelerant was used, your removal of some of your property makes clear that your intention was to set fire to the house. By doing so you caused serious damage. There was no-one else inside, but such fires inevitably pose a risk to other property and persons, including neighbours and the Tasmania Fire Service officers who were sent to attend to it. The house was used for public housing. It formed part of a scarce and valuable public resource and the cost of

its repair or replacement will be an impost on the whole community. You and others who may be minded to act in a similar way must understand that punishment will result. That means that a further part of the term I am about to impose must be actually served.

Because of your early plea of guilty I will reduce the term I would otherwise have imposed by nine months. To aid your rehabilitation, instead of ordering eligibility for parole, I will suspend part of the term on conditions which require supervision, the aim of which is to assist you to get your life back on track and address your drug use. It will be a condition of the order that you do not, while it is in place, commit any offence punishable by imprisonment. If you breach that condition you will be required to serve the suspended part of the term unless that is unjust.

Dakota Pearce-Riley, you are convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for 18 months from 20 January 2026. I make no order as to parole. I suspend nine months of that term for 18 months from your release on the following conditions:

- (a) you are not to commit another offence punishable by imprisonment during that period. If you breach that condition you will be required to serve the suspended part of the term unless that is unjust.
- (b) during the 18 month operational period of the order, you will be subject to the supervision of a probation officer. The conditions referred to in s 24(5B) of the *Sentencing Act* apply to this condition and will be set out in the order you will be given. These include that you must report to a probation officer at the office of Community Corrections in Launceston within three clear working days of your release, you must submit to supervision and comply with the directions given by your probation officer, you must not leave Tasmania without permission and you must notify of any change of address.
- (c) in addition to the core conditions, the order will also include the following special conditions that you must, during the operational period of the order:
 - i. submit to the supervision of a Community Corrections officer as required by that officer;
 - ii. attend educational and other programs, undergo assessment and treatment for alcohol or drug dependency, submit to testing for alcohol or drug use and submit to medical, psychological or psychiatric assessment or treatment as directed by a probation officer;
 - iii. attend and complete the EQUIPS addiction program as directed by a probation officer.

I make a compensation order in favour of Homes Tasmania and adjourn the further terms of that order to a date to be fixed.