

Tunnel, riot, now this ... heat is on over ACT inmates

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The ACT Government is again under fire for its treatment of detainees after two men broke out of the Belconnen Remand Centre yesterday morning and engaged police in a nine-hour stand-off from the facility's roof. Eventually the pair who shouted complaints about conditions in the centre agreed to come down yesterday afternoon, provided they were greeted with [McDonald's](#) food, cigarettes, Coke, icy poles, and the Corrective Services officers of their choice. It is the third significant security breach in less than two months. Earlier this month several Corrective Services officers were injured during a riot involving nine detainees, and in December one detainee was found to have dug a 1m tunnel in a bid for freedom.

ACT Human Rights Commissioner Helen Watchirs has warned the Government it could face legal action from detainees for inhumane treatment under the Human Rights Act, thanks to changes that took effect on January 1 allowing persons to directly sue Government agencies and officers in the ACT Supreme Court. Dr Watchirs has written to Corrections Minister John Hargreaves twice in recent months urging him to consider using the empty Quamby Remand Centre as a temporary solution until the new prison opens, but she is yet to receive an adequate response. Mr Hargreaves is on leave. "I think it is open for a court to find that those conditions of detention are inhumane ..." Dr Watchirs said. "In our view all existing facilities should be utilised, particularly Quamby given that the young people all moved out in December." Opposition corrections spokesman Jeremy Hanson said the Government should have found an alternative to Belconnen Remand Centre long ago, and had pinned all its hopes on the new jail opening on time. "The Government should be embarrassed about BRC on two fronts: one is the inadequate security, that we've now had two apparent escape attempts that have come close to succeeding, and the other is the human rights compliance of the facility. "If you are in the custody of the Government, the Government has a responsibility to treat you humanely. I'm not advocating for luxury, but there should be humane conditions." The Canberra Times can reveal the two men involved in the apparent escape attempt were Ashley James Alchin, 26, of Wagga Wagga, who was charged earlier this month with leading NSW and ACT Police in a dramatic 200km cross-border car chase, and alleged house burglar

Daniel James Craft, 22, of Symonston. The pair were detected about 3am when police at the adjoining Belconnen Police Station heard noises on the roof of the remand centre. They spotted Craft and Alchin on the roof and a cordon was set up. Police negotiated with the men until midday when they came down after police agreed to several of their demands. Alchin told police he and Craft were not planning to escape.