

MEDIA RELEASE – 13 November 2025

Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates First Nation's Caucus

Victorian youth justice reforms fail everyone

The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates First Nations Caucus strongly opposes the Victorian Government's proposed "adult time for violent crime" reforms, which would allow children as young as 14 to be tried and sentenced in adult courts.

These proposals are not evidence-based, nor are they consistent with what keeps communities safe. The overwhelming evidence - in Australia and internationally - shows that incarcerating children increases the frequency and severity of offending. "Tough-on-crime" approaches have failed repeatedly, across jurisdictions and generations. They do not deter crime; they entrench it.

Such laws echo a long and painful history of policy failure - from the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody to the 2017 Northern Territory Royal Commission - all of which reached the same conclusion: criminalising and imprisoning children causes harm and makes our communities less safe.

Children and young people who will be most affected by these laws are those already failed by multiple systems - disproportionately Aboriginal children and those experiencing poverty, disability, or family violence. Often, these children and young people have been victims of crime themselves before engaging in criminal behaviours. Evidence is clear that the most effective responses to youth offending are community-led, culturally grounded, and focused on early intervention, prevention and rehabilitation.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19 requires adults to protect children from harm, and Article 40 requires that detention be used only as a last resort and for the shortest possible time. These obligations are being disregarded when children are punished for behaviours that so often stem from trauma, neglect and violence.

No state or territory can jail its way out of the issues driving offending by children and young people. Nobody can reasonably expect that criminalising children and subjecting them to further deprivation of their fundamental human rights will lead to a safer or more prosperous society.

As adults, we must take responsibility for building a country where children's needs are met, their trauma is healed, and their rights are respected. We call for national leadership that moves beyond punitive cycles and toward evidence-based, rights-respecting reform that invests in children and their communities. Our children deserve protection, not punishment - and the future of our nation depends on it.

Quotes attributable to Meena Singh, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Victoria

Yesterday, Treaty was signed in Victoria. It was also the day the Victorian Government announced children should be treated like adults when it comes to violent offending, with 14-year-olds to be tried in the County Court with the potential for life sentencing. First Nations families and community know that when laws like this come into effect, they will disproportionately impact our children and young people, as well as children and young people who have experienced trauma, family violence and have unmet mental health and wellbeing needs. These new laws will not create a safer Victoria.

The obligation of the Victorian Government is to follow the evidence in framing justice policies that recognise the critical differences between adults and children, and to properly invest in critically needed prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation. That is our best chance of solutions that make our communities safer.

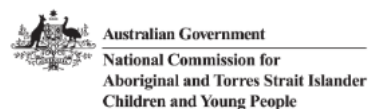
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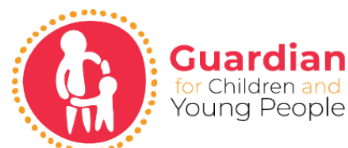
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