



Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates

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Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates call for NT Government to centre the rights of children in new legislation

Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates (ACCGA) urgently call on the Northern Territory Government to centre the rights of children when it comes to policies that impact the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory.

On Wednesday 8 July, the Legislative Scrutiny Committee tabled their final report on the inquiry into the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026 following the death of five-year-old, Kumanjayi Little Baby in Alice Springs, NT on 25 April 2026.

The Bill removes the legal enforceability of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle so that it only applies 'as far as practicable' and caps protection orders at two years in favour of increasing permanent placements.

ACCGA strongly urges the Northern Territory Government to pause the Bill in its current form as it risks repeating structural failures that can lead to the tragic loss of a child.

The ACCGA are deeply concerned by the circumstances that led to the recent resignation of Northern Territory Children's Commissioner Shahleena Musk from her role due to the Northern Territory Government's refusal to consider established evidence, or the voices of children, experts and Elders in its approach to governance, transparency and child protection reform.

All commissioners, guardians and advocates have a legislated responsibility to hold governments to account on matters relating to the wellbeing of our children and young people.

We acknowledge the commitment of the Department of Children and Families to review and streamline kinship carer assessment and approval processes to alleviate existing issues. However, this alone will not address the systemic drivers of over-representation and removal of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory.

ACCGA joined over 120 leaders, organisations and advocates raising grave concerns for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Northern Territory in relation to the Bill.

ACCGA's submission states the Bill raises substantial concerns regarding the protection of rights, adequacy of safeguards, and consistency with national reform frameworks and associated commitments, including *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* and the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates (ANZCCGA) Co-Chairs Sue-Anne Hunter and Jodie Griffiths-Cook, acknowledged the report's reference to submissions from commissioners and advocates that the Bill would shift the child protection system 'from a holistic, culturally informed model of child protection to a hierarchical and compliance-driven framework.'

Jodie Griffiths-Cook, Co-Chair, ACT Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner said that every child has a birthright to be connected to their family.

"The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle should be considered holistically when it comes to the safety and wellbeing of a child and not treated as a hierarchy that fails to prioritise a child's connection to their identity."

"Under the new legislation, there is a greater risk that children in the NT would be separated from family, culture and community, on a pathway towards permanent care."

Sue-Anne Hunter, Co-Chair and National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People said, "The Bill's amendments to remove rights-based language when it comes to decision-making about our kids does not remove their intrinsic rights as part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

"Our children are rights-holders, inheritors of cultural knowledge and leaders and experts in their own right – this should be front and centre when it comes to policies that impact their lives."

Shahleena Musk, Northern Territory Children's Commissioner expressed in a statement that she was 'concerned by the Northern Territory Government's approach to substantial and wide-reaching changes to child protection laws.'

'In my view, reforms of this significance must be grounded in evidence, informed by those with frontline experience, and developed through genuine consultation with experts, independent institutions and frontline organisations established to protect children and promote accountability.' – Shahleena Musk, Northern Territory Children's Commissioner

ACCGA urges the Assembly to effectively consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations towards legislative reform that is based on evidence on what is best for Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory, upholding self-determination for our peoples.

ENDS



Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates

This statement has been endorsed by the following ACCGA members:



Deb Tsorbaris
National Children's
Commissioner (Australia)



National Commission for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Children and Young People



Jodie Griffiths-Cook
Public Advocate and Children
and Young People Commissioner
(ACT), & **ANZCCGA Co-Chair**



Katherine McKernan
Advocate for Children and
Young People (NSW)



Shahleena Musk
Children's Commissioner (NT)



Shona Reid
Guardian for Children
and Young People (SA)



Dr Kylie Heneker
Commissioner for Children
and Young People (SA)



Dale Agius
Commissioner for Aboriginal
Children and Young People (SA)



Tracy Beaton
Principal Commissioner for
Children and Young People (VIC)



Dallas Widdicombe
Commissioner for Aboriginal
Children and Young People (VIC)



Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner for Children and
Young People (WA)

For media requests relating to the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, please contact Dea Burness, Steady Ground: dea@steadyground.com.au / 0402 484 721.

To learn more about the National Commission, visit: www.ncatsicyp.gov.au

Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians, and Advocates (ACCGA)

Australian Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates (ACCGA) is a collective body that is part of Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians, and Advocates (ANZCCGA) promoting and protecting the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, including by seeking to ensure that the best interests of children and young people are considered in public policy, program development, and decision-making. By working collaboratively across jurisdictions, ANZCCGA seeks to address national and systemic challenges and align policy and best practice service delivery.

For more information, contact ANZCCGASecretariat@ncatsicyp.gov.au