



NATSILS
National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

11 March 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOINT STATEMENT: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services call for urgent action from Government after three Black deaths in custody in one week.

The National peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (**NATSILS**) have today held a meeting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (**ATSILS**) representatives from around the country, to call for urgent action from the Prime Minister and State and Territory leaders for an end to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody.

NATSILS has been partnering with, and today met with, representatives of 15 families of loved ones who have died in custody to develop a campaign that they are governing and leading to end this injustice once and for all. NATSILS met with representatives from the Attorney General's Department and National Indigenous Australians Agency, and First Nations Labor members of Parliament and discussed the importance of the Federal Government and all sides of politics coming together to work with the families left behind and to implement the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommendations.

This meeting happens with the news of three Aboriginal deaths in custody in the past week in Victoria and New South Wales, and as findings are handed down in the coronial inquest of Nathan Reynolds. The coroner found that Nathan, who died from an asthma attack in prison, required an emergency response, that the response he received fell short of this, that the response was "confused, uncoordinated and unreasonably delayed" and that the "delay deprived Nathan the chance to survive."

NATSILS members made the following statement:

"We are horrified and deeply upset that there have been three Black deaths in custody in the past week. Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones at this incredibly difficult time. On April 15, it will have been 30 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. We are extremely concerned that while our people continue to die in custody at alarming rates, Federal, state and territory governments have had the answers to end this injustice for 30 years but have chosen not to act. Governments have chosen not to prioritise saving Black lives.

30 years on from the Royal Commission, we call on governments to go beyond the empty gestures of the past, and to make sure that the legacy of every single person who has died in custody is honoured by ending this injustice for good. Our people have marched, we have raised our voices, we have participated in inquiry after inquiry, we have shared our stories and developed solutions. And yet governments are standing by while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are dying under their watch, in their prisons, police cells and during police pursuits.

There have now been almost 500 deaths in custody since the Royal Commission handed down their findings, and we demand that there is transparency and accountability for the implementation of these recommendations and relevant coronial recommendations. We must see these injustices for our people end and accountability for those responsible.

NATSILS supports the calls from fifteen families whose loved ones have died in custody, who have created a [petition](#) urging Prime Minister Scott Morrison to meet with them face to face for the 30 year anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Their petition has received over 15,000 signatures.

Our thoughts are with the family of Nathan Reynolds, whose coronial findings handed down today found that his death was contributed to by deficiencies in management and inadequate emergency responses from Corrective Services. He should still be with his family and children today.

The voices of the families devastated by this lack of political will for change must be heard, and we need to see culturally safe supports and Aboriginal-led solutions. We need to see the evidence based, life saving Custody Notification Services mandatory and fully resourced for ATSILS to run in every single state and territory, and to provide culturally safe support and legal representation to the families following a death in custody. Our organisations have called for practical and necessary [policy and law reform solutions](#) for 50 years. We need to see every recommendation of the Royal Commission implemented.

Governments must not hide behind Closing the Gap or any other government policy to delay the urgent action and systemic change needed right now. We need to see Governments take immediate action and work with these families and Aboriginal organisations to implement the recommendations to stop our people senselessly and violently dying in custody.

NATSILS stand in solidarity and deep respect with all families whose loved ones have died in custody in their calls for change, justice and accountability.”

Representing the 15 families whose loved ones have died in custody on the Steering Committee, Rosemary Roe and Jungaji Brady said:

“We as the families are cumbersome & tired of the old adages, ‘just wait a minute, we’ll get to you when we are good and ready’. 500 Black lives lost since 1991 including 3 this past week is profoundly inexplicable, we demand immediate action to these human rights abuses this year, the 30 year anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Black Deaths in Custody.”

END OF RELEASE. Media contact: Lucy Brown, natsilsmedia@vals.org.au, 0435 866 462