



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aboriginal Legal Services warn against national ‘child jail crisis’

The peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services says it is bracing for a dramatic increase in child incarceration around the nation, as multiple governments shift back to failed, punitive policies and abandon commitments under Closing the Gap.

“The tragic shift back to failed, punitive policies will lead to a lot more children in jail and more dangerous communities,” Karly Warner, Chair of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) said.

“We fear the worst when it comes to children in custody. We are already seeing an increase, and recent history tells us that the outcomes will be unimaginable and tragic.

“State and territory governments around Australia are ignoring the evidence on what prevents crime. That means more and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are going to be locked up in circumstances that other children wouldn’t be, compounding generations of structural racism and discrimination.

“Meanwhile, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services around the country are currently only able to support a fraction of the people who need our help, including victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

“Law and order posturing about punishment, power and control has never worked before and it won’t work now. The responsibility of governments is to do everything possible to prevent crime, not to look tough in response.

“We are extremely concerned that the proven programs that actually work to prevent crime – which have never been properly supported or funded – will now be even further deprioritised.

“Putting 10-year-old children in jail and increasing incarceration won’t reduce crime. It will perpetuate the cycles of trauma, violence and government neglect that led us here in the first place. We need to support young people, families and communities, not harm them.

“We are appealing to the federal government to fund our services properly to ensure children are not locked up when others wouldn’t be. Our sincere hope is that the looming child jail crisis can be avoided if governments agree to listen to us and focus on what can be done to prevent crime rather than on what makes them look tough,” Ms Warner said.

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