



**NATSILS**

National Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **“Jail has never once helped a child”: Day of sadness as NT pushes ahead with attack on vulnerable children**

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) says the passage of new laws lowering the age of legal responsibility will increase crime and cause permanent harm to vulnerable children.

“Time spent in jail can permanently harm children and set them on a tragic course that can destroy lives, families and increase crime,” said Karly Warner, Chair of NATSILS.

“Jail has never once helped a child or their community. Jailing children is just a lazy response that fuels cycles of disadvantage and makes everyone worse off. This will backfire. This is a sad day that we’ll remember.

“The new Chief Minister claims that this will allow the government to intervene earlier. That was never the case previously and it won’t be this time either.

“The NT already has by far the highest imprisonment rates in Australia – if jailing children worked, this would already be the safest place in the country.

“We know that the NT government has only just gotten started. Next, they will be reintroducing spit hoods in youth prisons, which are essentially a form of torture. The NT Children’s Commissioner has said spit hoods or spit guards are known to cause irreparable harm and must not be used on children. We’ve seen an Aboriginal person, Wayne ‘Fella’ Morrison, die in custody in South Australia after being forced into a spit hood and this is a tragedy we never want to see again. Bringing back spit hoods for use on children as young as 10 would be a shameful slide back into regressive, Victorian-era punishment that will set the NT back by decades.

“If we continue down this path, we will only worsen the crisis of Aboriginal mass incarceration, make communities more dangerous and risk unimaginable tragedies. This is entirely avoidable.

“We are pleading with the NT Government to slow down and listen. Please: there is a path forward that reduces crime and protects children. Those should be your objectives,” Ms Warner said.

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