



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

MEDIA RELEASE

Scrap SA's Street Gangs Bill: Rushed, baseless and dangerous

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The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) and Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM) are concerned that the Street Gangs Bill, which is expected to be debated in Parliament this week will criminalise children for life, drive more children into prison, and ultimately make communities less safe.

Klynton Wanganeen, CEO ALRM, says "This harmful legislation is being rushed through without any evidence-base, and will ultimately make communities less safe.

"This Bill criminalises children based on who they are, who they are with, or even what they wear. It hands extraordinary powers to police to surveil and target children indefinitely, instead of supporting them.

"We cannot sit by and allow laws to pass that criminalise our children and put them on the express lane to a life of crime.

"The control orders and over-surveillance this bill proposes will not make communities safer. They will make communities more dangerous, result in more young people trapped in the justice system and compound the trauma our communities endure.

"The Attorney General called for submissions on youth justice reforms, but those have not been made public. The secrecy surrounding this consultation with community members, especially Aboriginal community-controlled and legal organisations, should be a red flag.

"Calling for submissions is a good first step, but those submissions have to be assessed by Aboriginal Leaders, and recommendations made by Aboriginal Leaders should be implemented to reduce these behaviours," says Mr Wanganeen.

Melissa Clarke, General Manager NATSILS says "The South Australian Government is prioritising political-point scoring over the safety of our communities and the rights of children.

"South Australia already has the second lowest youth crime rates in the country – second to ACT – and the number of children proceeded against by police fell by 17% in 2023-24. Over the last five years, the rate of young people in detention has also declined. The results have come from solutions that work – diversion, early intervention, and therapeutic supports – not through criminalising children further.

The Attorney-General has a choice: he can scapegoat children to look tough on crime, or he can invest in addressing the root causes of offending. The solutions are already working — we just need to scale them up.”

“If the South Australian Government wants to make communities safer, it must invest in proven, community-led solutions – not more punishment. We already know what works: diversion, early intervention, and therapeutic supports which prevent crime before it happens.

“The proposed laws will increase racial profiling and disproportionately target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — and the Attorney-General knows that.

“The Attorney General needs to take the time to speak with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and listen. But if he insists on fast-tracking a Bill that will make communities more dangerous, he is choosing to ignore both the evidence and our communities,” says Ms Clarke.

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