



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

MEDIA RELEASE

200-plus organisations and leaders urge PM to call emergency youth justice summit

8th April 2026

206 organisations and leaders from across civil society have penned an open letter to the Prime Minister, urging him to call an emergency summit on youth justice where governments can listen to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal experts and leaders.

Nerita Waight, Acting Chair of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), said state and territory governments across the country are actively pursuing punitive policies that are driving the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Right now, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being criminalised and imprisoned at alarming rates. This is because state and territory governments are pursuing policies that criminalise children and make communities more dangerous – all in the name of political point-scoring,” said Ms Waight.

The Prime Minister recently confirmed in his annual Closing the Gap update that Australia is not on track in reducing incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

“Australians are being sold a false choice between safety and children’s rights. The evidence shows you get neither when you jail more kids,” Ms Waight said.

“Locking children up not only inflicts trauma on the child, but it also increases the likelihood that they will reoffend as an adolescent or adult – ultimately increasing future crime.”

Ms Waight said that NATSILS alongside the 205 signatories to the letter are urging the Prime Minister to show leadership to put an end to the national crisis.

“This shameful crisis is affecting children and communities from all corners of our country, and it requires national leadership.

“Our letter is a warning flare. Act now, or own the consequences of a new generation being locked up for political gain,” Ms Waight said.

Ms Waight said advice [obtained from Senior Counsel last year made clear that the Commonwealth has the Constitutional power to act on youth justice reform](#), as well as the moral obligation.

“In the past 2 years alone, we have seen 11-year-olds locked up in watch houses, we have seen the re-introduction of dangerous and cruel spit hoods. We have seen a State Premier boasting about introducing laws that could impose life sentences on children as young as 14.”

“Prime Minister Albanese promised to lead a government that supports reconciliation with, and a more just society for, First Nations people.

“But when 36 per cent of the prison population is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and with the continuing and shameful lack of progress on justice outcomes under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, it is not possible for you to achieve this vision without urgent and meaningful action to change the justice system.

“If the Prime Minister wants a “more just society”, he must start by stopping the spiral into a generation of Aboriginal children in jail.

“More than 200 organisations and leaders have come together with a clear message for the Prime Minister: it’s time for you to take urgent and meaningful action to support our children and make the community safer,” said Ms Waight.

Read the open letter here: <https://www.natsils.org.au/open-letter-pm/>

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