



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

MEDIA RELEASE

Aboriginal children imprisoned at alarming rates and in worsening conditions makes communities less safe

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The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) will give evidence today at the Senate Youth Justice Inquiry and highlight the failure of the federal government to keep communities safe by presiding over the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Nick Espie, General Manager of NATSILS, says putting more children behind bars makes communities less safe and will only perpetuate cycles of crime and disadvantage.

“Inquiry after inquiry, submission after submission, all of which call for investment in prevention and solutions that make communities safe, the federal government refuses to acknowledge how state and territory governments are making communities more dangerous.

“The conditions in youth detention centres are regressive and deeply dangerous. We have seen the reintroduction of spit hoods. Children are spending days in adult watch-houses. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in detention is increasing, and the majority of them are unsentenced.

“Across states and territories, laws are cropping up that are making communities less safe. Premiers and Chief Ministers know this but lock up children anyway. How can the Prime Minister allow this to happen?

“The Prime Minister has the legal authority to step up and show leadership, but any meaningful action remains to be seen.

“Senior Counsel advice obtained last year supports the Commonwealth’s legal authority to make laws that are in line with Australia’s international obligations on children’s rights.

“Children and families are being torn apart. Children as young as 10 are being thrown in detention. The evidence is clear: if we continue down this path, communities across Australia will be less safe.

“We are in a national youth justice crisis. The Prime Minister must call an emergency summit on youth justice.

“We urge him to meet his moral obligation to show the leadership Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are calling for,” says Mr Espie.

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