



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE



**Real Safety
True Justice**

MEDIA RELEASE

Prime Minister refuses to meet with Aboriginal delegation to receive open letter on youth justice crisis

19 August 2026

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is in Canberra today to directly call on the Prime Minister to fulfill his moral responsibility to keep communities across Australia safe by putting an end to the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Nerita Waight, Chair of NATSILS, says the Prime Minister has refused to show any leadership amidst the country's youth justice crisis, even when more children are behind bars than ever before.

"In both his election night speeches, Prime Minister Albanese promised to stand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And yet it seems he is now sending a deliberate message that he is turning his back on us.

"We requested he meet with us this week, and we asked him to join us at our event, and he declined to make himself available for either," Ms Waight said.

"This comes after he also failed to show at Garma. So I put it to you Prime Minister, have you decided to abandon us after the referendum? Do our children matter? Are they not deserving of safety?

"Under the Prime Minister's watch our children are languishing in detention at unprecedented rates. States and territories across the country are racing against one another for the most punitive policies they can come up with, for the sake of political-point scoring.

"More than 200 organisations, and more than 1,500 individuals have signed an open letter urging the Prime Minister to call an emergency summit on youth justice.

"We are seeing children as young as 11 locked up in watchhouses. We've seen a premier boast about life sentences for children. We've seen the reintroduction of cruel spithoods on children. It's a disgusting race to the bottom right across the country," said Ms Waight.

“These policies are not just harmful to children. The evidence is clear that they make the community less safe; any time spent behind bars increases the child’s likelihood of reoffending and guarantees the cycle of incarceration continues unabated,” Ms Waight said.

“The Federal Government’s standard response is that this is a matter for the states and territories. That’s an utter lie. Senior Counsel advice delivered to the Prime Minister last year made it clear that the Commonwealth has legal authority to make laws on this issue.

“To date that advice has been ignored, but it is not too late for the Prime Minister to show leadership. We are urging him to stay true to his promise to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“We, along with thousands of other voices, urge the Prime Minister to act and call an emergency summit on youth justice,” says Ms Waight.

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