



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

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MEDIA RELEASE

Senate Inquiry backs calls for PM to take leadership on youth justice crisis

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NATSILS welcomes the key recommendation of Youth Incarceration and Youth Justice Inquiry Report, which is for the Commonwealth to introduce national minimum standards for the treatment of children in the youth justice system, says Nick Espie, Executive Director of NATSILS.

“This along with the other findings of the report make it utterly clear that the Prime Minister has an obligation and responsibility to act to end the youth justice crisis that is seeing our children locked up at unprecedented rates.

“States and territories across the country are doubling down on punitive policies that are driving the mass incarceration of our children. This not only harms them, it makes the community less safe.

“National minimum standards would be one key step towards fixing this crisis. It could include a standard such as arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

“We await a response from Government and welcome the opportunity to work with the Commonwealth, states and territories to work through what the minimum standards are. The standards need to be embedded in legislation and with relevant accountability mechanisms and in consultation with ATSILS,” says Mr Espie.

Key recommendations from the inquiry report include

1. **National minimum standards** for the treatment of children in the justice system.
2. **Establish a cross-portfolio National Child and Community Safety Taskforce** comprising Commonwealth, state and territory child justice and policing bodies as well as education, social services, health services including disability services, legal services and employment departments and agencies to coordinate national reform to Australia's youth justice system.
3. **The Australian Government undertake an education campaign** focused on children and young people in conflict with the law which provides evidence-based

information on youth crime, as well as highlighting the benefits of alternatives to the incarceration of children to community safety and wellbeing.

4. The Senate Community Affairs References Committee undertake **an inquiry into the factors that contribute to youth incarceration in Australia** including access to health, education, disability, community, social and legal services.

“This Report cannot be another report that gathers dust or just leads to yet another inquiry. Communities deserve better than an inquiry vortex that delays national minimum standards. The recommendation that the Prime Minister act has been informed by evidence given by hundreds of experts and people with lived experience. It is crystal clear what the Prime Minister must do,” says Mr Espie.

“The Prime Minister must show some actual leadership to end this crisis,” Mr Espie said.

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