

**Aboriginal Peak Organisations
Northern Territory (APO NT)**

MEDIA RELEASE

The time is now to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility

Thursday 27th August 2020

Aboriginal Peak Organisations (APO NT) has welcomed the Australian Capital Territory's recent decision to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years to 14 years.

This decision is consistent with the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory in 2017 and acknowledges concerns raised by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child that the minimum age for criminal responsibility in Australia is too young. Australia has failed to uphold this standard across all states and territories, including the Northern Territory.

"We are concerned about the discriminatory application of the current age of criminal responsibility and the disproportionate impact that this has on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families and our broader community," said APO NT spokesperson John Paterson.

Based on data from 2019, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are 24 times more likely to end up in detention than their non-Aboriginal peers. In the Northern Territory, it is estimated that 96% of the youth detention population are Aboriginal and that more than 70% of young people in youth detention are on remand.

"The evidence shows that early involvement in the criminal justice system creates a vicious cycle of disadvantage and reoffending. We believe the youth justice system needs further reform. Treating children so punitively is a fundamentally flawed approach. We should be providing appropriate support to children and their families, not locking them up."

APO NT was disappointed at the recent decision of the Council of Attorneys-General to delay a decision to raise the age of criminal responsibility, despite the clear recommendations of professional legal and health experts and public advocates.

"There is an opportunity here for our new Government in the Northern Territory to really make a difference and follow the lead of the Australian Capital Territory to raise the age of criminal responsibility. Such a decision will change children's life outcomes in the future."

"APO NT calls on the newly elected NT Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years as a first 100 days commitment, and match the principled stand taken by the Australian Capital Territory.

"We also call on the government to work with Aboriginal people and communities to implement sound policies and effective programs to ensure young children and their families have an opportunity to deal with any underlying social issues.

"A greater investment and commitment in our young people today will enrich their lives and create a better future for them and the whole community", John Paterson concluded.

For media comment:

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