

MEDIA RELEASE: NT Government's 'youth justice reforms' will see Aboriginal kids behind bars skyrocket

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Australia's only national First Nations-led justice coalition has today warned that the Gunner Government's proposed youth justice reforms will see the number of Aboriginal children behind bars skyrocket.

The reforms are highly punitive and will disproportionately drive Aboriginal kids into police and prison cells. Change the Record has highlighted that the proposed law changes fly in the face of the Royal Commission recommendations to invest in supporting children outside of the criminal justice system and move away from the 'tough on crime' policies that have been proven to fail.

Attributable to Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair Change the Record:

"If the NT Government goes ahead with these youth justice reforms it will take the Northern Territory back to the dark days before the Royal Commission when Don Dale was full of Aboriginal children being subjected to the most horrendous abuse.

"These proposed changes cannot be described as anything short of appalling. They ignore the Royal Commission recommendations, they will drive more of our children into police and prison cells, and they do nothing to invest in the community-driven solutions that all the evidence says we need.

"The evidence is very clear - the younger a child comes into contact with the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to become trapped in the criminal justice cycle and go on to offend in the future. The NT Government might think these law changes will be popular in the short term, but they are doomed to fail. We know, because previous NT Governments have tried them before and they did nothing to keep kids or the community safe.

"Building new remand centres to lock up Aboriginal children who have not even been found guilty of doing anything wrong is the last thing we need. There are 43 times the number of Aboriginal children locked up behind bars in the NT than non-Indigenous children. Now the NT Government is building new prisons to fill with more of our children - it is disgraceful.

"Denying children bail shuts down pathways out of the criminal justice system, and forces kids behind bars when they could be in the community. The Royal Commission was very clear that there are only a small number of circumstances in which a child should be denied bail, and they should only ever be put in detention as a last resort.

"These reforms beef up powers for police who we know already target our children, and do nothing to address the drivers of crime. There is no evidence that GPS tracking devices reduce crime, all they do is create another opportunity for kids to get pushed into prisons. The proposal that police could slap a tracking device on a child before they've even gone to court or been found guilty of a crime is outrageous.

“These reforms are punitive, they’re dangerous and they’re doomed to fail - and it’s our kids who will be hurt the most.”

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