



North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

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'Long awaited action to improving community safety'

Last week the Northern Territory Government took the necessary steps towards improving the safety of all Territorians, including our most vulnerable children, by announcing legislative changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility and mandatory sentencing. As a leading legal agency serving the community for the past 50 years, NAAJA fully supports these changes.

The evidence is clear, that jailing people does not equate to community safety, in fact it leads to increased risk of reoffending. It is also known that sentencing children aged 10-12 more than doubles their risk of reoffending compared to older children¹

"The revolving door of repeated incarceration is not working and does not improve community safety. We want to see responsive action, centred on addressing the risk factors for crime, because this leads to better outcomes for everyone", CEO of NAAJA Priscilla Atkins.

A fact less widely known is that majority (81% on average) of kids sitting in detention are on remand, waiting to be sentenced, many for minor offences, which for most 10- and 11-year old's will be their first offence. These are not hardened criminals. Keeping them in detention whilst the adults 'sort things out' only vastly increases their risk of further disadvantage and engagement with the justice system. At the taxpayers' expense these vulnerable and often traumatised kids, are missing out on valuable time engaging in programs, culture and community that will reintegrate them back into our communities in a safe and supported way.

¹ (Sentencing Council of Victoria report, 2016).

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