



North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

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'First steps towards a better future'

For the past two decades the tough on crime approach has failed our communities and our most vulnerable children. Yesterday the Northern Territory Labor government took the momentous step towards changing the direction of a system that is failing by raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12.

There is a long history of research that identifies early incarceration as a key factor of increased risk of reoffence and increased severity of subsequent offending behaviour. Locking kids up is a sure-fire way of increasing the likelihood of increasing crime rates and in turn creating more victims. The reality is that the majority of children aged 10 and 11 in incarceration will not receive a custodial sentence for their offence, and yet are subjected to the trauma we know the loss of liberty inflicts on the human psyche.

Those opposing the changes seem to be under the false perception that the first-time police arrest a child is the first indicator that this child is facing challenges. Neglecting to understand that their community and community led organisations are already aware of the support this young person needs. "The cost of imprisoning one child costs the taxpayers roughly \$4600 per day. The government needs to redirect these funds to better resource community-led organisations and initiatives to provide holistic services to improve outcomes for disenfranchised children and their families." Acting CEO of North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) Mark Munnich

When most of us look at our 10- and 11-year-old children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, we do not think they should take full legal responsibility for their actions, especially during times of distress. As Minister Kate Worden suggests, it's time for the adults to take responsibility for paving a better future for all Territorians, not only those identified as worthy by opposing members. NAAJA supports parliamentarian Mr Yingiya (Mark) Guyula calling for the return of cultural authority to Aboriginal communities for decision-making that impact Aboriginal children's lives. Mr Munnich "calls for governments to reinvest in Aboriginal community leadership to address issues of youth offending, instead of falling back on a failed approach time and time again."

Over the next two years NAAJA, along with many community organisations, are committed to working in partnership with the government to address key driving factors that will allow us to meet United Nation, international and medical expert standards to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14.

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