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Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System

Submission - Select Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs - Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System

The Youth Justice Crisis: Cages over Care

“Prime Minister, I strongly believe that you should come to Ashley Youth Detention Centre so that you can hear our voices in person ... It will break your heart.”

- 15-year-old male, Ashley Youth Detention Center (Tasmania)

For many children in Australia, first contact with the justice system does not come through protection or care - it comes through arrest. Before they receive therapy, they receive a charge. Before they are offered help, they are handcuffed. Children who should be in classrooms or playgrounds are instead surrounded by flashing lights, locked doors, and voices that call them criminals before asking them why they are hurting.

What begins as a cry for help becomes a criminal record. A ten-year-old in distress is treated as a problem to be managed, not a child to be comforted. These are children who have already been failed - by fractured families, underfunded schools, and systems that mistake poverty for neglect. Before they ever “broke the law,” they were broken by it.

“We’re still sons, brothers, friends. Some of us are artists, some are cooks, some want to work with cars, some write music. But when we’re locked up, people stop seeing us as human.”

- 15-20-year-old males, Cobham Youth Detention Centre (New South Wales)

Children should never have to convince the world that they are human.

As Australia's Youth Delegate to the United Nations,¹ I have travelled across the country, into the very shadows of our nation's youth detention centers, residential care homes, and remote communities, collecting handwritten letters and testimonies from the young people

¹ UN Youth Australia, “Youth Representative Program,” *UN Youth Australia*, accessed November 16, 2025, <https://unyouth.org.au/youth-representation/>.



our systems most often forget. These voices - a small cross-section of which are preserved in the Appendix of this submission - are not just isolated anecdotes; they are a damning indictment of a system that punishes trauma, deepens inequality, and neglects the fundamental humanity of those it confines.

The ultimate measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable children. Across more than 5000 consultations during the 2025 National Listening Tour, one truth resounds: Australia's youth justice system fails to protect, support, or restore. It punishes trauma, deepens inequality, and neglects the humanity of those it confines.

This submission calls for the establishment of enforceable national minimum standards to bring Australia into alignment with its international obligations - and its moral duty to protect every child.

“No kid in here knows when they will get out.”

- 15-year-old female, Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Australian Capital Territory)

These words were not spoken in anger, but in exhaustion. A fifteen-year-old girl, barely old enough to hold a learner's permit, was already learning what indefinite confinement feels like. The uncertainty of release is itself a form of punishment - a slow erosion of hope.

As Youth Representative, I was entrusted with testimonies that lay bare the cost of political inaction. These are not isolated anecdotes; they are evidence. Each story is an indictment of the systems that have turned care into control and protection into punishment.

Across Australia, young people are united in what they want: a justice system that listens, heals, and restores - one that recognises their pain not as a threat, but as a call for help.

Systemic Failures: International Law, Trauma, and Inhumanity

“They stripped me in my cell. The moment they pulled my pants down - that's when I stopped feeling like a human.”

- 14-year-old male, Ashley Youth Detention Centre (Tasmania)

As Australia's Youth Delegate to the United Nations, I have already stood before the General Assembly and spoken plainly: Australia is failing to meet the human-rights obligations it promised the world it would uphold. We have ratified the most fundamental international treaties guaranteeing every child dignity, safety, health, and protection from inhumane treatment - yet these rights are violated daily inside youth detention centres across our country.

The international community is not criticising Australia in the abstract. Their concerns are grounded in documented realities - realities I carried with me into the General Assembly



chamber. They reflect a nation that punishes children long before it ever protects them, a nation where vulnerability is criminalised instead of supported.

Australia's youth justice practices place us in **active breach of international law**. Although we are bound by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), children - some as young as ten - continue to be held in punitive, unsafe, and at times solitary confinement. These conditions violate the very treaties we claim to champion.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has, for years, called on Australia to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, abolish solitary confinement, and ensure that detention is used only as a last resort. Despite this, across states and territories, children - disproportionately First Nations children - remain behind bars in conditions that fail to meet even the most basic international standards.

My message to the General Assembly was clear: young Australians are not asking the world to protect Australia's reputation. They are asking Australia to reclaim its conscience. We want a country willing to confront the truth of its failings and reform with courage - a country that refuses to hide its wounded children in concrete cells and instead chooses to invest in their healing and their future.

For us, justice is not defined by arrests or convictions, but by the number of young lives restored.

Bringing Australia back into compliance with its international human-rights obligations is not a matter of political preference - it is a legal requirement and a moral necessity. Doing so would not only restore our credibility on the global stage but also rebuild trust at home: trust that our laws exist to protect children, not to break them. And trust that no child is beyond redemption.

To illustrate the scale of Australia's non-compliance, the following table outlines key breaches of international law related to the treatment and incarceration of children.



Breaches of International Law

Issue	What's Happening	Example from Consultations	International Law/Treaty Breached
Incarceration at Age 10 and Deprivation of Rights in Custody	Children as young as ten are detained, often in isolation for extended periods, with little or no access to education, legal representation, or family contact. ²	A sixteen-year-old in Queensland was allegedly held for nineteen days in an adult police watch house with no daylight and no change of clothes for six days. Young people in Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Western Australia reported five consecutive days without time outside due to staffing shortages.	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ³ – Article 37(b): Detention only as a last resort, for the shortest appropriate time. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 37(c): Humane and age-appropriate treatment. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – General Comment No. 24: Recommends the minimum age of criminal responsibility be at least fourteen.
Adult Sentencing of Children (Queensland “Adult Crime, Adult Time”)	Children are sentenced under adult criminal frameworks, with mandatory minimum sentences that remove the focus on	Law changes mean that if a child commits one of thirteen listed offences, the adult sentencing range applies. For these offences, a magistrate can sentence a child to up to 3 years’ probation or	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 40(1): Justice must reflect the child’s age and promote reintegration. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ⁵ – Article 10(3): Juvenile

²Australian Institute of Family Studies, Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility in Australia, last modified May 2023, Children as young as ten are detained, often in isolation for extended periods, with little or no access to education, legal representation, or family contact.

³ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted November 20, 1989, ratified by Australia December 17, 1990.

⁵ United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, ratified by Australia August 13, 1980.



	rehabilitation and restrict judicial discretion. ⁴	detention, while a judge can impose the same maximum penalty as for an adult, including life detention. Courts must pair restorative justice with another sentence for significant offences, though pre-sentence restorative processes are still allowed. Mandatory sentences for adults also apply to children for these offences.	offenders must be treated in accordance with their age.
Denial of Adequate Education in Youth Detention Centres	Education provision is minimal, with some young people receiving only two hours of schooling a day, far short of the recommended five.	Young people in Bimberi Youth Detention Centre (ACT) noted that even where education is meant to be provided, “two hours at most” was the reality, with little consistency or therapeutic support.	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 28: Right to education.
Re-introduction of spit hoods into youth detention in the	Despite international criticism, spit hoods have been reintroduced in Northern Territory youth detention facilities. ⁶ These	Young people and advocates described the practice as retraumatising for children already living with histories of violence and disability. First Nations leaders noted	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 37(a): Protection from torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment

⁴ Youth Action, “Adult Crime, Adult Time Laws,” accessed September 21, 2025, Children are sentenced under adult criminal frameworks, with mandatory minimum sentences that remove the focus on rehabilitation and restrict judicial discretion.

⁶ Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, “NT Spit Hoods,” last modified March 2022, 17 December 2015, Australia endorsed.



Northern Territory	<p>devices, which cover the head and restrict breathing and movement, are degrading, dangerous, and have been linked to deaths in custody. They amount to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.⁷</p>	<p>that this practice disproportionately targets First Nations youth, who make up approximately 95% of those incarcerated in the NT.⁸</p>	<p>Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture - Article 16: Obligation to prevent cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.</p> <p>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 7: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.</p> <p>United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules) - Rule 43 prohibits instruments of restraint that are inherently degrading.</p>
Denial of Basic Health Needs in Youth Detention Centres	<p>Young people in youth detention centres have reported being denied access to essential healthcare, including feminine hygiene products and prescribed medication for chronic conditions such as endometriosis. These practices amount to</p>	<p>Reports from Bimberi Youth Detention Centre (ACT) and Brisbane Youth Detention Centre (QLD) described girls going without sanitary products, leaving them humiliated and isolated. Others spoke about the refusal of staff to provide pain management or</p>	<p>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 24: Right to the highest attainable standard of health.</p> <p>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women⁹ - Article 12: Elimination of discrimination in access to health care, including reproductive health.</p>

⁷ Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, “NT Spit Hoods,” last modified March 2022, 17 December 2015, Australia endorsed.

⁸ North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, “Aboriginal Youth in Detention Hits Record High,” accessed September 21, 2025, <https://alhr.org.au/nt-spit-hoods/>.

⁹ United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted December 18, 1979, ratified by Australia July 28, 1983.



	neglect of basic dignity and create long-term harm.	medication for endometriosis.	United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules) ¹⁰ - Rule 24: Prisoners must enjoy the same standards of health care as are available in the community.
Federal Government Abdication of Oversight	The federal government defers responsibility for child protection and youth justice to states and territories, creating fragmented and inconsistent rights protections.	Queensland locks up the most children in Australia and has the longest stays in police watch houses. ¹¹ Consultation participants noted that gaps in federal housing policy contribute to family breakdown and child removal.	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 4: States must implement the Convention to the maximum of their available resources. Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties ¹² - Article 26: Treaties must be performed in good faith.
Obstruction of United Nations Torture Subcommittee (2023 Suspension)	New South Wales and Queensland denied United Nations inspectors' access to various youth detention centres and police watch houses. This resulted in	N/A	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12: States must allow access to detention by international monitors. Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture ¹⁴ - Article 17: Obligation to

¹⁰ United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules), adopted December 17, 2015, endorsed by Australia.

¹¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission, "Who's Responsible? Youth Justice," accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sector/monitoring-and-reviewing-systems/young-people-in-youth-justice/who%27s-responsible>.

¹² Australia acceded to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT) on June 13, 1974.

¹⁴ United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), adopted December 18, 2002, ratified by Australia December 21, 2017.



	<p>the suspension of its visit.</p> <p>This was one of only three such suspensions in the world.¹³</p>		<p>establish or cooperate with national preventive mechanisms.</p>
Overrepresentation of First Nations Youth in Care and Detention	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed from families at rates higher than during the Stolen Generations era, often placed in culturally inappropriate housing, and are overrepresented in youth detention.¹⁵</p>	<p>As of June 30, 2024, 44.5% of children aged 0 - 17 years in out-of-home care across Australia were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.¹⁶ Housing policies have resulted in overcrowding breaches that trigger child safety reports. Many young people transition from care directly into youth justice systems.</p>	<p>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 30: Indigenous children's right to culture and identity. Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹⁷ - Articles 7 - 8, 14: Right not to be subjected to forced assimilation; right to culturally appropriate education. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination¹⁸ – Article 2: Obligation to eliminate racial discrimination.</p>

¹³ Australian Human Rights Commission, “Urgent Action Needed Following Termination of UN Inspection,” media release, February 20, 2023, <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/urgent-action-needed-following-termination-un-inspection>.

¹⁵ Humanium, “The Ongoing Removal of Aboriginal Children from Their Families of Origin in Australia,” last modified July 2021, <https://www.humanium.org/en/the-ongoing-removal-of-aboriginal-children-from-their-families-of-origin-in-australia/>.

¹⁶ Productivity Commission, Closing the Gap Dashboard: Out-of-Home Care, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area12/out-of-home-care>

¹⁷ United Nations, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted September 13, 2007, A/RES/61/295, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>.

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Adopted December 21, 1965. U.N. Doc. A/6014/Rev.1. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>.



Criminalising Childhood: The Age of Shame

“I committed armed robbery just to eat.”

- 16-year-old male, Ashley Youth Detention Centre (Tasmania)

Many children entering the justice system are not driven by malice, but by desperation.

Across Australia, we criminalise poverty and trauma long before we offer support.

Australia's minimum age of criminal responsibility remains one of the lowest in the world. Children as young as ten are arrested, charged, and incarcerated - some before they have even learned to write in full sentences. Their so-called “offending” is often a direct response to hunger, homelessness, violence, or neglect. For a child stealing food because they have no dinner at home, the system responds not with care, but with handcuffs.

In Queensland, children continue to be sentenced under adult frameworks that disregard disability, developmental delay, and the profound effects of trauma.¹⁹ Courts often lack the tools - and sometimes the willingness - to distinguish between a criminal act and a child's survival behaviour.

South Australia has walked back previous commitments to raise the age, signalling a broader national hesitation to align with international human rights standards.²⁰ This retreat leaves vulnerable children trapped in a cycle of punishment instead of receiving early intervention and therapeutic support.

Meanwhile, Victoria has begun shifting toward harsher punitive measures, introducing “Adult Time for Violent Crime” laws.²¹ Under these changes, children as young as fourteen can be sentenced as adults in adult courts for certain serious offences. This removes the long-held legal safeguard that imprisonment should be a “last resort” for children. It dramatically increases both the likelihood and duration of incarceration, despite overwhelming evidence that harsher penalties push young people deeper into the justice system rather than addressing the causes of their behaviour.

In contrast, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has taken a modest but meaningful step forward by lifting the minimum age to fourteen.²² Yet even there, implementation gaps and

¹⁹ Youth Action, “Adult Crime, Adult Time Laws,” accessed September 21, 2025, Children are sentenced under adult criminal frameworks, with mandatory minimum sentences that remove the focus on rehabilitation and restrict judicial discretion.

²⁰ South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS), “Joint Media Release: SA Government Must Raise the Age to at Least 14,” SACOSS, accessed November 16, 2025, <https://sacoss.org.au/joint-media-release-sa-government-must-raise-the-age-to-at-least-14/>.

²¹ Victorian Government, “Adult Time for Violent Crime,” *Premier of Victoria*, November 12, 2025, <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/adult-time-violent-crime>.

²² Australian Capital Territory Government, “Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility,” *ACT Government, Law & Justice – Law Reforms*, accessed November 16, 2025, <https://www.act.gov.au/law-and-justice/law-reforms/raising-the-age-of-criminal-responsibility>.



inadequate service resourcing mean many children - particularly those with disabilities, those in out-of-home care, and those experiencing homelessness - still fall through the cracks.

Across jurisdictions, the pattern is unmistakable: Australia responds to children's unmet needs with punishment, not support. It criminalises their distress, their poverty, their disabilities, and their attempts to survive. Until we choose to address the structural conditions driving children into the system - rather than intensifying the system itself - stories like that of the 16-year-old boy who robbed simply to eat will continue to define our national shame.

Criminalising Disability and Disadvantage

“They locked up 14-year-olds with disabilities for 23 hours a day – then wonder why they broke.”

- 17-year-old female, Albany, Western Australia

Across the nation, children with neuro-disabilities, hearing loss, and mental health conditions continue to be punished for behaviours that stem directly from those very impairments. Instead of receiving therapeutic support, they are met with force, restraint, and disciplinary measures that deepen trauma and reinforce disadvantage.

When I spoke to one family, they described their younger male sibling, being thrown to the floor by police for “not following commands” he simply could not hear. He is deaf. What officers interpreted as defiance was in fact a disability, they neither recognised nor accommodated. His story is not an outlier - it is emblematic of a system that responds to vulnerability with punishment rather than understanding.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Western Australia, where an estimated 90 per cent of children detained at Banksia Hill Detention Centre live with severe neurodisabilities.²³ Chronic staffing shortages mean many spend nearly an entire day in isolation, deprived of education, connection, and stimulation. The United Nations has deemed this prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture, yet it remains routine practice for some of the most vulnerable children in the state.²⁴

These conditions expose a fundamental failure: our youth justice system criminalises trauma and disability instead of addressing them. Behaviours linked to autism, ADHD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, anxiety, or hearing impairments are misinterpreted as wilful misconduct, triggering punitive responses that only worsen the underlying issues.

²³ Nicolas Perpitch, “Nine out of 10 Banksia Hill Youth Detainees Have Severe Brain Impairment,” *ABC News*, February 14, 2018, accessed November 16, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-14/majority-banksia-hill-detainees-have-mental-impairment/9435364>.

²⁴ Nicolas Perpitch, “Australia Must End Solitary Confinement of Children, UN Committee against Torture Says,” *The Guardian*, November 28, 2022, accessed November 16, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/nov/28/australia-must-end-solitary-confinement-of-children-un-committee-against-torture-says>.



When a child's symptoms are treated as crimes, the state abdicates its most basic duty of care. A humane system would recognise these behaviours as signs of unmet need and respond with specialist support, trauma-informed practice, and community-based intervention - not force, isolation, or incarceration.

Until we confront this reality, we will continue to punish children not for who they are, but for the ways society has failed to understand and support them.

Denial of Dignity and Basic Rights

“Bimberi Health doesn’t listen to or help with female problems like endometriosis. They refuse to give heat packs or adequate medication.”

- 15-year-old female, Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (ACT)

Inside youth detention, dignity is not a given - it is carefully measured out, withheld, or granted at the discretion of the system. Across multiple facilities, young people consistently describe conditions marked by prolonged lockdowns, severely limited access to education, and routine neglect of even their most basic physical and mental health needs.

At the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, for example, several girls reported being refused adequate pain relief for chronic and recurring medical conditions. Others recounted spending as many as seventeen hours each day confined to their cells, emerging only briefly for limited recreation and receiving no more than two hours of formal schooling.

These are not the conditions of a therapeutic or rehabilitative environment. They are conditions of deprivation - conditions that compound trauma rather than alleviate it.

The withholding of menstrual hygiene products, essential medication for chronic pain, or timely mental health support cannot be dismissed as mere administrative oversight. It represents a profound moral failure. Such practices violate basic standards of care that Australia has pledged to uphold, breaching not only domestic child-welfare guidelines but also the nation's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention Against Torture.

“Life is better in a cell with a bed and food as opposed to the streets.”

- 16-year-old male, Brisbane, Queensland

When survival is only guaranteed behind bars, we have failed as a society.

Structural Pipelines of Harm

“Growing up in a low-income household with our fathers not being there – we try to find joy outside but we end up finding it in the wrong places.”



-19-year-old male, Melbourne, Victoria

“When I was a young teen, I didn’t have much support or family to help lead me in the right path, so I started hanging around the wrong crowd … it’s what I saw growing up.”

- 18-year-old male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre (South Australia)

Youth incarceration does not begin in a courtroom. It begins in homes without safety nets, schools without inclusion, and systems that mistake struggle for delinquency.

Across Australia, three interconnected pipelines drive child incarceration:

(1) The Care-to-Prison Pipeline: Children removed from their families due to alleged safety concerns often enter a system that fails to provide stability, healing, or culturally grounded care. Instead, many - particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - are placed in environments marked by frequent placement changes, institutionalisation, and heightened surveillance. Misinterpretations of poverty or cultural child-rearing practices as “neglect” disproportionately funnel Indigenous children into statutory care. With limited therapeutic support and a system that responds to trauma with punitive measures, these children face a dramatically increased risk of criminalisation for behaviours that are symptomatic of their distress. Over time, the child-protection system becomes less a haven and more an on-ramp to youth detention.

(2) The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Across Australia, disabled students, First Nations students, and those from socio-economically marginalised backgrounds encounter schooling environments that prioritise compliance over inclusion. Behaviours linked to disability, trauma, or cultural misunderstanding are frequently reframed as defiance, leading to disproportionate suspensions, exclusions, and “informal” removals from school. Once removed, many young people find themselves with no alternative education pathways, inadequate support services, and long periods of disengagement that heighten vulnerability to police intervention. In effect, schools that lack adequate resourcing, cultural capability, or disability-inclusive frameworks function not as places of learning but as early sorting mechanisms into the justice system.

(3) Geographic Injustice: For children living in remote and regional communities - particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities - the justice system often operates at a vast physical and cultural distance. Young people may be detained in facilities hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from their families, Elders, and Country, severing critical connections that support identity, wellbeing, and rehabilitation. Contact with legal representation is frequently mediated through unstable phone or video links, with limited opportunity for meaningful engagement or advocacy. Cultural programs and language-specific services are often scarce or entirely absent. The sheer remoteness, combined with systemic underinvestment in community-based alternatives, means that detention becomes the default response rather than a last resort.



In the Northern Territory, punitive bail laws and the reintroduction of spit hoods have entrenched cycles of harm.²⁵ Many children are flown across vast distances, separated from kinship systems and cultural identity, due to the closing of local holding facilities. The result is predictable: trauma compounds, and trust erodes.

Overrepresentation and Racism in the Criminal Justice System

“We might be criminals but we’re still people.”

-15–20-year-old males, Cobham Youth Detention Centre (NSW)

The overrepresentation of First Nations children is not a tragic coincidence - it is the defining feature of youth incarceration in Australia. It is the direct result of colonisation's unfinished business: intergenerational trauma, displacement from Country, and a system that continues to police Aboriginal identity rather than protect Aboriginal children.

In most states and territories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up the vast majority of those in detention.²⁶ In South Australia, systemic racism, poverty, and a lack of culturally safe services sustain disproportionate incarceration rates. In New South Wales and Victoria, African-Australian and Pasifika young people report routine over-policing, racial profiling, and surveillance in public spaces.

For migrant and refugee families, fear of authorities silences reporting of abuse or neglect, creating another layer of vulnerability. The pattern is national, but its impact is personal - visible in the faces of children who learn early that justice looks different depending on the colour of your skin or the suburb you were born in.

This is not a coincidence; it is consequence. Consequence of colonial laws that still shape modern policing. Consequence of underfunded schools and cultural bias in child protection. Consequence of a nation yet to reconcile justice with equity.

Australia cannot claim to honour its commitments under the Closing the Gap framework or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child while its prisons remain filled with the children of the very communities it has dispossessed.

²⁵ Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, “NT Spit Hoods,” last modified March 2022, 17 December 2015, Australia endorsed.

²⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Youth Detention Population in Australia 2024*, AIHW, accessed November 16, 2025, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2024/contents/summary/first-nations-young-people-in-detention>.



The Path to Restoration: Justice Reinvestment and Youth Autonomy

“Why hasn’t the government [provided] more funding to solve youth crime issues... We would also like to ask you to involve troubled youths to have a say in what’s happening in the world we live in.”

- 17-year-old female, Ashley Youth Detention Centre (Tasmania)

Across every jurisdiction, young people are calling for a justice system that protects rather than punishes - one built on healing, education, and belonging, not confinement. They are asking governments to replace fear with faith: to see them not as statistics or risks, but as people with potential.

They want investment in their futures, not their failures. They want community, culture, and care placed at the centre of justice. Because when young people are supported to heal, they stop reoffending. When they are trusted to lead, they do.

Justice reinvestment - redirecting funds from prisons to prevention - is not a radical idea. It is a return to common sense. Every dollar spent on incarceration could fund school counsellors, community mentors, and therapeutic programs that give children the skills and confidence to rebuild their lives.

In every conversation, one truth echoed: young people do not fear accountability - they fear being forgotten.

Evidence for Effective Alternatives

“I hate when school kids come on excursions to watch our court trials. It’s their assignments, and our lives.”

- 18-year-old male, Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, Queensland

From these stories, it is clear that punishment does not change lives - opportunity does. Young people and community organisations consistently call for alternatives that are not only humane, but proven to work. United Nations Youth Australia recommends the following alternative systems to the existing youth justice and incarceration system, based on our findings from our 2025 Listening Tour.

Across the country, First Nations-led, community-based diversion programs are reducing reoffending and restoring hope. Culturally safe bail support and on-Country programs reconnect young people with language, elders, and identity. Education and skills programs in



detention - from trade workshops to music studios - show what happens when children are given purpose rather than punishment.

In New South Wales, young people describe kitchens and trade centres in detention as lifelines - spaces where they can rediscover pride in work, creativity, and self-worth. In Victoria, there are calls to expand trade training at Cherry Creek and to reform Working with Children Checks, so that those who have served time can mentor others instead of being locked out of employment.

Programs like Backtrack in Armidale show what happens when we invest in people instead of prisons.²⁷ Combining mentoring, apprenticeships, and connection to culture, Backtrack has transformed lives and communities by proving that compassion, not containment, is what stops the cycle of reoffending.

In the ACT, place-based First Nations programs continue to demonstrate that when support is rooted in Country and kinship, healing follows.

Yet despite decades of royal commissions and inquiries, governments continue to fund prisons over prevention. In Queensland, the construction of a new ninety-bed youth prison at Woodford contradicts promises of smaller, therapeutic facilities. In the Northern Territory, children are still flown hundreds of kilometres from home because local community-based alternatives remain underfunded or unavailable.

Australia does not lack evidence - it lacks courage. The blueprint for change already exists, written in the work of community leaders who prove every day that restoration is possible.

Models of Rehabilitative Services

The path to reform is not theoretical. It already exists in programs that show what happens when we trust young people to lead their own recovery.

Sisters Inside Inc. (Queensland)²⁸ - An Aboriginal-led organisation advocating for the rights of criminalised women and girls, Sisters Inside operates on the belief that no person is "good" or "bad" - only shaped by the opportunities and environments around them. Through housing, education, and family support, it has rebuilt thousands of lives, proving that dignity and justice can coexist.

The South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group (Victoria)²⁹ - A national network of community leaders and young people with lived experience of the justice system who now design pathways out of it. Members conduct "table talks" inside centres like Cherry Creek, mentoring peers to set goals and envision a life beyond detention. Their authority comes not from credentials, but from survival - and from turning pain into purpose.

²⁷ BackTrack Youth Works, "The BackTrack Story," BackTrack, <https://backtrack.org.au/the-backtrack-story/>.

²⁸ Sisters Inside Inc., "About Sisters Inside," <https://sistersinside.com.au/about-sisters-inside/>.

²⁹ Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria. "South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group." <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/SSAYJ>



King's Narrative (Northern Territory)³⁰ - An Aboriginal-led initiative staffed entirely by Aboriginal men, offering mentorship, cultural reconnection, and pathways to education and employment. By grounding young people in identity and cultural pride, it transforms the concept of justice from something imposed to something rebuilt within community.

These are not pilot programs or experiments. They are proof. They demonstrate that when young people are trusted, resourced, and believed in, they flourish. They remind us that justice is achieved by rebuilding a person, not breaking them.

These programs prove that when young people are trusted, resourced, and believed in, they flourish. They remind us that justice is achieved by rebuilding a person, not breaking them.

Recommendations

This submission also puts forward recommendations directed at state, territory, and federal governments, grounded in what young people themselves have shared with me - from inside youth detention centres, from community programs, and from the margins of the system. Their voices form the backbone of these proposals, calling for action that is not only evidence-based but experience-led - informed by those who have lived the consequences of current policies and who continue to hope for a justice system rooted in care, accountability, and humanity. Many of these recommendations align with others proposed by relevant bodies - such as the Australian Human Rights Commission - particularly the recent "Help way Earlier" report produced by the National Children's Commissioner, Anne Hollonds, in May 2025.³¹

Federal Recommendations

Conditional Federal Funding for Child Rights Compliance (s 96)

Action: Leverage Section 96 of the Australian Constitution to attach conditions to federal funding for states and territories, ensuring compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Federal transfers should be contingent on raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and implementing non-custodial alternatives for children.

Lead: Treasury; Attorney-General's Department

Partners: Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), National Children's Commissioner, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Measure of Success: Number of states/territories adopting reforms; reduction in child incarceration rates; compliance reports with CRC and CAT obligations.

³⁰ King's Narrative, "Homepage," <https://www.kingsnarrative.com.au/>.

³¹ Australian Human Rights Commission, "Help Way Earlier! How Australia Can Transform Child Justice to Improve Safety and Wellbeing" (May 23, 2025).



Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 4** calls for embedding the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) across Australian law and policy. The use of s 96 conditional funding would operationalise this by tying Commonwealth financial power to child-rights compliance.
- **Recommendation 20** (raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14) is the primary reform that conditional grants could mandate.
- **Recommendation 22** (full and accelerated OPCAT implementation) and **Recommendation 21** (national minimum detention standards) would be strengthened through federal leverage on states and territories.
- **Recommendation 5** (place-based, integrated child and family services) and **Recommendation 14** (Aboriginal-led service systems) would be incentivised where states tie funding to community-based alternatives and reduced child incarceration.

Section 96 funding conditions would therefore be the most powerful Commonwealth lever to ensure state compliance with the CRC, CAT, and the national report's recommendations.

Enlivening the External Affairs Power (s 51(xxix))

Action: Invoke the Commonwealth's External Affairs Power under section 51(xxix) to require states and territories to meet national child-rights standards as a condition of receiving federal funding. This approach would prevent fragmented rights protections by ensuring that federal financial support is tied to compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT).

Condition: States and territories must commit to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 and implementing non-custodial, therapeutic responses for children.

Lead: Attorney-General's Department; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Partners: Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), National Children's Commissioner, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Measure of Success: National adoption of minimum age reforms; increased use of therapeutic, non-custodial measures; demonstrable alignment with CRC and CAT requirements; strengthened national consistency in rights protections as supported by the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 4** urges incorporation of the CRC into Australian law, ideally through a National Children's Act or Human Rights Act framework. Using s 51(xxix) is a constitutionally viable way to achieve this without requiring uniform state legislation.
- **Recommendation 20** (raise the age to 14) and **Recommendation 19** (ban solitary confinement and harmful detention practices) are areas where federal intervention is justified under international obligations.
- **Recommendation 21** (national standards and monitoring) would be strengthened by federal legislative leadership anchored in the CRC and OPCAT.



- **Recommendation 23 (child rights impact assessments) would gain legal force if required under federal legislation grounded in treaty obligations.**

Social Reinvestment Funds

Action: Establish a National Social Reinvestment Framework to encourage states to ring-fence custodial budgets for community diversion (modelled on Social Reinvestment Western Australia)³².

Lead: Council of Australian Governments (COAG)/Treasury

Partners: Social Reinvestment Western Australia, Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS), state justice departments

Measure of Success: Percentage of custodial budget reallocated; number of community programs funded.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 5** emphasises integrated, place-based, holistic services that address structural drivers of contact with the justice system; social reinvestment is designed to do exactly this.
- **Recommendation 12 (expand evidence-based diversion) and Recommendation 13 (expand restorative justice conferencing) rely on stable community funding - which reinvestment frameworks provide.**
- **Recommendation 14** calls for Aboriginal community-controlled service growth; reinvestment mechanisms allow federal and state budgets to be redirected toward these organisations.
- **Recommendation 24 (embed lived experience) is a core principle of social reinvestment models, particularly the WA model.**

State and Territory Recommendations

Australian Capital Territory

ACT Youth Justice Reform

Action: Establish a comprehensive Youth Justice Reform Package in the ACT to accompany the raised age of criminal responsibility. This should include investment in culturally safe diversion programs (particularly First Nations-led), expansion of bail support and community-based alternatives, and enforceable minimum standards for detention conditions covering education, health care (including female health needs), and time out of cell.

Lead: ACT Government (Justice and Community Safety Directorate; Education Directorate; Health Directorate)

Partners: Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services, ACT Human Rights Commission, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, community legal centres, youth advocacy organisations

³² "About Us," *Social Reinvestment WA*, accessed August 30, 2025, <https://www.socialreinvestmentwa.org.au/>.



Measure of Success: Reduction in remand and detention rates; hours of daily education delivered in Bimberi; increased access to appropriate health care (including for female detainees); number of young people diverted to community programs; reduced rates of recidivism on release

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 20** (*raise age and review of *doli incapax**)
- **Recommendations 12 - 13** (*expand diversion programs and restorative justice conferencing nationally*).
- **Recommendation 21** (*nationally consistent monitoring standards for detention*) and **Recommendation 19** (*prohibit solitary confinement and harsh isolation*).
- **Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 14**, which call for *place-based, community-controlled, integrated services aligned with the Closing the Gap framework*.

ACT Youth Housing Support for Young People Exiting Detention

Action: Establish a targeted housing support strategy for young people exiting detention in the ACT. This should include transitional accommodation linked with wraparound services, long-term affordable housing pathways, and specific culturally safe housing options for First Nations youth. The strategy must prioritise stability, prevent homelessness, and address barriers such as discrimination in the rental market and gaps in post-release support.

Lead: ACT Government (Housing Directorate; Justice and Community Safety Directorate; Community Services Directorate)

Partners: Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Canberra, ACT Human Rights Commission, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, community housing providers, youth advocacy organisations, lived experience advisory groups

Measure of Success: Reduction in homelessness rates among young people exiting detention; number of young people transitioned into stable long-term housing; uptake of culturally safe housing programs by First Nations youth; reduced rates of recidivism linked to housing insecurity; increased self-reported wellbeing and community connection among participants.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 5** (*integrated, place-based services*)
- **Recommendation 24** (*involving lived experience in co-design of supports*).
- **Recommendation 14** (*place-based Aboriginal-led service design*).
- **Recommendation 12** (*expand evidence-based diversion and reintegration programs*).



New South Wales

Raise Age of Criminal Responsibility and Therapeutic Models

Action: Raise minimum criminal responsibility age to 14; fund restorative justice and diversion programs including BackTrack (Armidale).

Lead: Attorney General & Ministry for Police and Justice

Partners: BackTrack, Aboriginal Legal Service New South Wales/ Australian Capital Territory, youth justice NGOs

Measure of Success: Reduced youth remand numbers; lower recidivism rates.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- *Recommendation 20: Raise the age to 14.*
- *Recommendations 12 - 13: Strengthen diversion and restore conferencing as a core justice pathway.*
Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 14: Recommend community-led, evidence-based services.

Legislate NSW Youth Strategy

Action: Enact statutory NSW Youth Strategy with co-design and independent oversight.

Lead: NSW Department of Communities & Justice

Partners: Youth Action (NSW), CREATE Foundation, Aboriginal/community-controlled organisations

Measure of Success: Annual progress report; youth participation metrics.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- *Recommendation 4 (incorporate the CRC through a National Children's Act or Human Rights Act mechanisms) by embedding child-rights accountability at state level.*
- *Recommendation 23 (Child Rights Impact Assessments) through mandated assessment of laws and policies.*
- *Recommendation 21 encourages oversight bodies to monitor services consistently across jurisdictions.*

Northern Territory

Raise Age of Criminal Responsibility to 14 and Implement Royal Commission Recommendations

Action: Amend legislation and implement 3-year roadmap; fund community-led alternatives (Bush Mob, Children's Ground, CAAMA).

Lead: NT Government (Territory Families)



Partners: Bush Mob, Children's Ground, CAAMA, Tangentyere Council, Australian Red Cross

Measure of Success: % reduction in juvenile detention; number of children diverted to community programs.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 20** (*raise age to 14 and eliminate criminalisation of young children*).
- **Recommendations 12 - 14**: *Expand community-led diversion, particularly Aboriginal-led therapeutic programs such as Bush Mob and Children's Ground.*

End Relocation of Children to Distant Detention

Action: Stop flying children from Central Australia to distant facilities; invest in local therapeutic detention alternatives.

Lead: Territory Families, Correctional Services

Partners: Tangentyere Council, local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations

Measure of Success: Percentage of youth held within home communities.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendations 5 and 14**: *Place-based, culturally grounded supports close to community.*
- **Recommendation 21**: *Ensure detention standards - including wellbeing and cultural connection - are consistently monitored and upheld.*

Funding Reforms of Rehabilitation Programs

Action: Remove 16-week funding cap for organisations like Bush Mob; shift to multi-year operational funding – to emphasise need for long-term rehabilitation programs

Lead: Territory Families; philanthropy partnerships

Partners: Rehabilitation programs such as Bush Mob

Measure of Success: Participant retention; facility upgrades.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 5**: *Long-term, integrated services.*
- **Recommendation 12**: *Evidence-based diversion with adequate duration and continuity.*
- **Recommendation 24**: *Co-design with lived experience.*



Queensland

Raise Age of Criminal Responsibility to 14

Action: Immediate legislative reform; expand diversion programs (Transition to Success, Youth Empowered towards Independence, Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good).

Lead: Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women; Attorney-General

Partners: Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ), Transition to Success, Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good

Measure of Success: Reduced youth detention committals; increased diversion placements.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- ***Recommendation 20: Raise the age to 14.***
- ***Recommendations 12 - 13: Diversion and restorative initiatives such as Transition to Success and Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good.***

End Adult Watchhouse Use for Children

Action: Statutory prohibition; resource specialist youth custody alternatives.

Lead: Queensland Police Service and Department of Justice

Partners: Youth justice non-governmental organisations

Measure of Success: 0% of children held in adult watchhouses.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- ***Recommendation 19: Prohibit solitary confinement and harmful detention practices (adult watchhouses breach this directly).***
- ***Recommendation 21: Establish national minimum detention standards and independent monitoring.***
- ***Recommendation 22: Accelerate OPCAT implementation, which would prevent such practices.***

South Australia

Raise Age to 14; Repeal Public Precinct Policing Powers

Action: Legislative reform; resource restorative justice programs.

Lead: Attorney-General's Office & South Australian Police

Partners: Restorative Justice SA, legal aid services

Measure of Success: Juvenile detention rates; restorative program participation.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment



- **Recommendation 20: Raising the age to 14.**
- **Recommendations 12 - 13: Justice conferencing and diversion - contrasted with punitive policing discretion.**
- **Recommendation 23: Child Rights Impact Assessments, which SA policing powers currently fail.**

Tasmania

Fund Youth Activities in Detention and Community Engagement

Action: Fund recreational, mentoring, and training programs in detention and community diversion.

Lead: Department of Justice

Partners: Youth services, local Aboriginal programs

Measure of Success: Program participation; reduced reoffending rates.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 12: Community-based diversion supports.**
- **Recommendations 5 and 14: Place-based, culturally informed program delivery.**
- **Recommendation 21: Improved detention standards, including education, wellbeing, and activity-based rehabilitation.**

Victoria

Raise Age to 14 and Expand Restorative Alternatives

Action: Legislative reform and funding for HomeBase-style community alternatives

Lead: Department of Justice & Community Safety

Partners: HomeBase, Aboriginal Legal Service Victoria

Measure of Success: Reduced youth detention rates; completion of restorative programs.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- **Recommendation 20: Raising the age to 14.**
- **Recommendations 12 - 13: Restorative programs and diversion, such as HomeBase.**
- **Recommendation 21: Improving conditions and oversight of youth justice centres.**

Western Australia

Trauma-Informed Alternatives & Home Stretch Western Australia Scale-Up

Action: Invest in community-based therapeutic alternatives to detention; expand Home Stretch Western Australia for care leavers to age 25.

Lead: Department of Communities



Partners: Home Stretch Western Australia, CREATE Foundation, Aboriginal community organisations

Measure of Success: Reduced youth custody rates; improved housing outcomes for care leavers.

Help Way Earlier! Recommendation Alignment

- ***Recommendations 12 - 14: Diversion and culturally safe, place-based services, especially for Aboriginal young people.***
- ***Recommendation 5 (integrated, cross-system supports) and Recommendation 24 (co-design with lived experience).***

A Request to Be a Witness

I would be honoured to appear as a witness to present these findings and recommendations. My participation, I hope, would help ensure that the Committee has direct access to the voices, experiences, and evidence that too often remain hidden from public scrutiny. In particular:

(1) A Public Testimony of Letters:

I seek the opportunity to **publicly, on the record**, read out the many handwritten letters I collected directly from young people in detention across the country - some as young as ten years old. Alongside their written testimonies, I would also document my own direct, physical interactions with my peers in detention - the moments of fear, resilience, humour, and exhaustion I witnessed while sitting with them in their cells, classrooms, and common areas. Bringing this human texture into the room is essential: it allows the Committee and the Australian public to see these children not as case files or statistics, but as real people living through the consequences of our policy failures.

In addition to this human evidence, I would also provide my own analysis, informed by my role as Australia's Youth Delegate to the United Nations, on the international law breaches reflected in these testimonies. These brave, unfiltered words - paired with both lived reality and rigorous international legal analysis - must be heard to fully understand the human stakes of youth detention in Australia.

(2) A Private Sitting with Detained Youth:

I request that the Committee facilitate a private, closed-door sitting with myself, accompanied by a small group of young people I have met in detention, ideally from the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre if the hearing is in the ACT. This private hearing is essential to protect the privacy, dignity, and safety of the young people, allowing them to speak freely and honestly without fear of retribution.



Conclusion

Australia's youth have already illuminated the truth. Their voices are not mere testimony; they are a cry against systemic betrayal. These children, already bearing the immense weight of structural failure, poverty, and inherited trauma, are being punished - again and again - for the very issues society failed to fix. Their brave, unfiltered, and unforgettable words deliver a clear, scorching demand that strikes at the nation's conscience.

This is the unavoidable moral mandate:

We must tear down this justice system built on damage and despair, which criminalizes vulnerability, and build one rooted in dignity, protection, and profound, sustained healing. We must immediately cease defaulting to the cruel cycles of punishment that crush young lives and instead provide the genuine, immediate support necessary to break the chains of disadvantage. The goal is simple, non-negotiable, and urgent: to ensure every child, irrespective of the burdens placed upon them, is guaranteed the security they were owed and can finally achieve their fundamental human right to freedom.

The time for debate is over. The silence ends now. The duty to act is absolute, and the nation demands justice for its children.



Satara Uthayakumaran

2025 Australian Youth Delegate to the United Nations.



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APPENDIX 1: LETTERS TO THE PRIME MINISTER FROM YOUTH IN JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES ACROSS THE NATION

MAIL

Letter to the Prime guy

My name is [REDACTED] I'm 16 and I haven't had a good experience with life at young before I was born CYF where trying to take me away from my mom. Then when I was born I stayed with my mom till I was 3 then went with my [REDACTED]. I would get beaten every day CYF would check up and do nothing I would tell them I'm getting hurt, starved, yelled at and they still did nothing they never let me see my mom because of 18 year orders so I ran away and they caught me and put me back there so I ran again and found my mom after 11 years then I had my first time with Police I was in a house while it was getting Raided and they threatening to taser me when I did nothing and everyone a cop would see me they would chase me for no reason. ~~the~~ I got Remanded in Bimberi and it was all good but staff would say shit stuff to me like I did it on purpose I killed two people and making fun of me they I got passed if I got out and CYF said I can't live with my mom so they sent me to SYP with no support I Recoffended straight away then I went to Cobham for 2 months ~~then~~ I came back to ~~Cobham~~ (Bimberi) then this is where the shit starts No one would help my mom come out to see me, I got told by ~~the~~ someone a worker was talking about my court case saying in a gronk, unremorseful about what happen. ~~we~~ we get not that much school, programs I hope you do something about the system, CYF and cops here's something I think need to change

①

A

1 MALLY things that ~~the~~ Need to change
1 cyf - taking kids for No Reason from there parents

2 the system - for a better Relaxed time
Not getting abused by "youth workers"

3 Police - to Not think im a crim for who my family
is or how i dress

4 More support for young people for when they
get out from doing a long time

5 - Housing - for people who have no where, ^{to go} because
I know ill have no where when i get out

6 more school work for while inside

but THANKS for reading my letter if you even
did some guy hope you do something about
what i've listed.

And have a good day keep a smile

FROM - MALLY / 
-- \$\$\$
 18/9/25

on
your
face


inside bimberi

16 y.o., male, Bimberi Youth Detention Centre, Australian Capital Territory

dear Anthony Albanese,

I am in Latitikitika Lutruwita/Tasmania
Ashley youth Detention centre

I would like bail accommodation for the kid's who don't have a safe home or a home to go to. Because the reason I'm down here is because I didn't have a ~~at~~ bail address to go to.

I would like it if we had more fundings for sports and stuff like that for the family's who don't have money for the thing they would like to do.

I would also like to have more things on the outside to do instead of crime.

I would also like if we ~~are~~ can still get a good job with a bad history.

J H

14 y.o., male, Ashley Youth Detention Centre, Tasmania

Dear Pm,

My name is [REDACTED] and i'm writing from bimberi youth justice center in The ACT

in bimberi

- Most of the time we are Locked in our cells for up to 17 hours
- i have watched bimberi use force on a yp for 20 mins
- When i first came in all the cells where disgusting and they make us clean everything our selves
- The food here is absolutely Putrid
- bimberi health dose not Listen or help with female Problems like endometriosis They refuse to give heat Packs or adequate Medication
- They Make us use our Points which is equivalent to Money in bimberi To Purchase female Products such as ~~as~~ deodorant

to the Prime Minister

8/9/2025

Dear Sir Anthony Alhanese, I am youth currently
detained at Ashley Youth Detention.

With all due respect my life is not easy due to the fact that
we don't have such a well behaviour out in public.

But I DESERVE A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE IN.

As the cells at Ashley Youth Detention are Degrading
the cells are dirty, small showers, showers to hot.

And I am asking from you Sir Prime Minister for more funding, More help
done with youth to tell them out the help they NEED! JAP youth is a
good help but, Reckon more mistakes.

For Male and Male JAP youth not just for now, and I truly mean with all due
Respect we NEED Centres for the younger people and also

With all due respect come see if your self,
when I got arrested I got strip searched. I DID NOT FEEL
HUMAN.

Yours ~~Respectfully~~

to Anthony Alhanese

Dear Anthony Albonese

I am aboriginal and grew up in Cape Barren where I feel cultural appreciation was more evident - I was able to go into the bush with a machete when I wanted without fear of repercussions. If I tried to do the same thing here in town, Police would surround me straight away. There was more trust in young people.

Prime minister, I strongly believe that you should come to Ashley-Youth-Detention-Centre so that you can hear our voices in person, not read them, so it is more authentic experience - it will break your heart.

From B

Ashley-Youth-Detention

my first time coming to AYDC I was 15 I did 4 and 1/2 months
4 again my first time it was so that I could eat,
Because I did so long my first time it completely
Desensitised me to not ok things I have now spent
17 out of the last 24 months in AYDC

I would like you to come have a conversation
with the youth and stuff from AYDC
Sincerely N,17

17 y.o., male, Ashley Youth Detention Centre, Tasmania

Dear your Honour:

I am in latitikika, Lutruwita/Tasmania - ashley
youth detention center, we need to have more rights
in the center when we get out we should have
the same rights as every one and it should
be just as easy to get a job out in the
community its discrimination. I would like to be an
elector when i get out of this shit hole.

16 y.o., male, Ashley Youth Detention Centre, Tasmania

24/06/25

To the honourable prime minister anthony albanese, we are youths from ashley youth detention centre and we strongly believe that every young person should have the opportunity to have a voice that is heard.

Even though we are in youth detention, we should still have the support we need to self-advocate.

We are asking you to provide more funding for youth activities and support workers to ensure that we have things to do, both here and on the outside, to keep us entertained so we are not going out of our way to entertain ourselves with crime.

The result of increased funding would lead to a cleaner and sustain a healthier environment in the community and within detention centres.

We cordially invite you to visit AYDC to discuss further our ideas in person, if not we looks forward to hearing back from you.

17 y.o., female, Ashley Youth Detention Centre, Tasmania

to the Honorable Prime minister
Why hasn't the government solved more funding
to solve youth crime issues, I am [REDACTED] 17
I'm a Resident of ashley youth detention centre
drug use and crime have been prominent parts
of my life since I was born. I have been
in and out of the youth justice system since 2021.

Most of the residents in here know nothing but crime.
we don't know how to write resumes, we don't know how
to apply for a job. [REDACTED] was never taught these
things at school or at home. what we need
is for someone to teach us how to do things
people consider "normal" like getting a license,
or applying for a loan.

The government needs to support us better,
to stop us ending up here, or to rehabilitate
us when we do. we need to develop rehabilitation
centers and stop punishing kids. punishing kids
doesn't change anything

sincerely [REDACTED] 17

- What's the hardest part of being young in Australia right now?

Being judged, or looked
at differently and not
looking at things from our
perspective

- What do adults or politicians often get wrong about young people?

that they don't ask about
why young people do the things they
do or what's happen to them in
the past.

- What does justice mean to you?

Consequences should be
the same for everyone if
they've done the same thing

Dear Prime Minister,

We're writing to you from Cobham Juvenile Justice Centre. We're young people, some of us still kids. But what we want you to know is that we're not just what we've done.

In your eyes we might be "criminals" but we're still people.

That's the part people forget. We're still sons, brothers, friends. Some of us are artists, some are cooks, some want to work with cars, some write music. But when we're locked up, people stop seeing us as human. They stop believing we can change.

This place gives us food, a bed, and a shower. Some of us never had even that growing up. But surviving isn't the same as living, and it definitely isn't the same as healing. Some of us sit in rooms, alone, for way too long. But it's just more confinement for no reason.

It's super hard to get a job once you're out. It's harder for us. And when you finally get out, there's no one there to guide you. You're just expected to make it on your own. Maybe that's why some of us end up coming back.

We need more programs that don't just keep us busy, but actually help us grow. The commercial kitchen we had here, the Pay It Forward program, where we made meals for people doing it tough - that gave us pride. That made us feel like we were doing something right for once. One of us said, "It was a way of helping us connect with the community." That meant something.

The new trade centre here has already changed lives. A visiting mechanic was so impressed with one of the boy's work, he offered him a job when he got out. That's what works: real skills, real hope, real second chances.

We want more music. More painting. Painting helps keep many of our boys calm. These things aren't just hobbies. They're therapy. They're expression. They help us cope.

We want to mix with other units more. Friday prayer is one of the only times different cultures come together. That kind of stuff breaks down the gang mindset more than punishment ever could. We'd like to see more of that.

Some of us have ADHD, dyslexia, or grew up in homes where no one showed us how to live right. We need support before we even get here, so we don't end up here at all. Help us not mix with the wrong crowd in the first place."

We also see how unfair the system can be. Some of us never stood a chance with the lawyers we got. If they think you're guilty, they won't help you. It doesn't feel fair. And we know there are some systems for some groups, like the Koori Court or Aboriginal Legal Service, but they're underfunded and some of us, who are also from disadvantaged would like support.

We want to work for something while we're in here. We want to leave with purpose. Maybe if we all had a one-on-one mentor when we got out, we'd have a better shot at staying out. Maybe if more people believed in us, we'd learn to believe in ourselves.

We're not asking for everything. We're just asking for chances. For a proper mattress. A therapist. A cleaner room. The return of funded TAFE programs. A therapy dog. A barista course. A shot at a normal life.

You have the power to make that possible, and for all the kids who'll come through here after us. We're not lost causes. We're young people trying to find our way back. And we need your help.

Sincerely,
The Young People at Cobham Juvenile Justice Centre

Mparntwe/Alice Springs
Northern Territory
0870

The kid in shackles on our domestic flight got us thinking:

Dear Prime Minister (Anthony Albanese)

We are two young leaders from Mparntwe/Alice Springs. We often fly up to Darwin for leadership opportunities. We know you travel for your job, probably often getting escorted onto a plane with your private security. We've seen young people being escorted onto planes, in shackles and handcuffs.

We fly with kids who are in custody. Who are treated like animals. Who are being moved 2000km away from home. We are the same age as these handcuffed young people. We sit on the same plane, a few seats away. But we have very different reasons for stepping onto the tarmac.

Seeing these kids being boarded on to the plane the first time was shocking. We remember the leather belt around a particular young person's waist - a restraint designed to keep them shackled to their security guards. Standing between the grown men, this 14 year old looked so small and vulnerable. It was clear that he was terrified.

It's easy to forget that these young detainees are just kids. The way the media talks makes them sound like hardened criminals, sometimes even describing them in inhuman ways. But seeing them in person brings clarity. They're not adults, they're not inhuman. They are kids, kids younger than your own son, they were scared and humiliated. The public humiliation, where young people are essentially paraded in front of airline passengers needs to end. They should not be shackled, nor chained to prison guards.

The Commonwealth Government, your government, must raise the age of criminal responsibility nationwide, to fourteen years old. If the Commonwealth Government believes that ten-year-olds need to be protected from social media, then they must protect ten-year-olds

from incarceration. The statistics are clear, locking children up leads to trauma, disconnection and cycles of reincarceration, not rehabilitation. Raising the age is the first tangible step to building a system that is just, and gives young offenders a chance to succeed, not one that fails them at every stage.

There is not enough support for young people. Especially young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who have been continuously stereotyped to serve political agendas. More funding needs to go towards therapeutic programs that support young people's wellbeing. There needs to be recognition that these young people are the future. They deserve every opportunity that any other young person growing up in Australia gets.

We call on both the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments to support education opportunities across the Northern Territory, especially in remote and low socioeconomic areas. Every young person should have equal access to high quality education—regardless of the school they attend, their heritage, history of incarceration or the suburb that they live in. We also believe that access to tertiary education should not be limited by cost, transport or geography. Every young person should have the opportunity to complete further education if they choose to.

Finally, we ask you to listen to young people on key legislative and political issues that affect them, so that policy is developed with young people, not just for them. When governments work alongside young people, solutions are more affective, just and inclusive. More importantly, young people feel heard, and are more receptive to policy changes.

Sincerely,
Two young people who are not in custody