



Media Release

Tuesday June 24, 2024 – For immediate release.

100+ Organisations tell the NSW Government to do better for kids and community safety.

A network of more than 100 NSW organisations have [made a joint submission](#) to the NSW Government [Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities](#).

Everyone wants safer communities, and we know that punitive approaches, particularly those directed at children, don't deliver.

The submission says the NSW Government can deliver on community safety by:

1. **Resourcing and supporting Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations** to work with First Nations children, families, and communities.
2. **Investing in services that prevent crime from the start** like public health, public education from early childhood and beyond, and community-based child, youth and family services.
3. **Funding targeted services and interventions that help kids learn to be accountable, and do better** when they go off track.
4. **Being guided by evidence** when it comes to children and contact with police and the justice system **and raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14** without exception.

The group backing the submission is diverse, and includes Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, peak bodies, large charities, small community and place-based organisations, and influential and respected voices and experts from across NSW and Australia.

A significant number of the signatories provide frontline services in regional and rural communities across the state.

The submission was drafted by a Lead Group of 13 key organisations:

[Aboriginal Legal Service \(NSW/ACT\) Ltd](#)
[AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation](#)
[Amnesty International Australia](#)
[ANTAR](#)
[Australian Services Union NSW ACT Services Branch](#)
[Community Legal Centres NSW](#)
[Just Reinvest NSW](#)
[Justice Reform Initiative](#)
[NSW Council of Social Services](#)
[NSW Council for Civil Liberties](#)
[NSW Teachers Federation](#)
[Public Interest Advocacy Centre](#)
[Youth Action](#)

The submission is supported by a total of 108 organisations:

Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Ltd	Centre for Criminology Law and Justice
AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation	Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care, Australian Childhood Foundation
Accountable Futures Collective	Change the Record
Amnesty International Australia	Community First Step
Amnesty Newcastle	Community Legal Centres NSW
ANTAR	Community Restorative Centre
Anti-Poverty Week	CREATE Foundation
Association of Children's Welfare Agencies	Criminal Justice Cluster, Faculty of Law, University of Technology Sydney
Australian Centre for Disability Law	Deadly Connections Community & Justice Services Limited
Australian Lawyers Alliance	Domestic Violence NSW
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights	Empowering Parents In Crisis (EPIC)
Australian Services Union NSW ACT Services Branch	Fams
BackTrack	Food Education Australia The Big Feed
Bad Apples Music	Harris Park Community Centre Inc
Barnardos Australia	Homelessness NSW
BEING Mental Health Consumers	Hopeful Monsters
Blacktown Area Community Centres Inc.	Human Nature Adventure Therapy
Brave Therapy Inc	Human Rights Law Centre
CASPA Services Ltd	Humanity Matters
Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre	Hunter Community Legal Centre
Centre 360	ID. Know Yourself
	In Films
	Inner City Legal Centre

Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research (Research Unit)
Just Reinvest NSW
Justice Reform Initiative
Karabi Community & Development Services Inc.
KidsXpress Ltd
Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation
Kingsford Legal Centre
knowmore legal service
Life Without Barriers
Local Community Services Association
Matana Foundation for Young People
Mental Health Carers NSW Inc.
Mental Health Coordinating Council
Mercy Foundation
Midjuburi Youth Resource Centre
Milan Dhiiyaan
Mission Australia
NCOSS
Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA)
NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
NSW Council for Civil Liberties
NSW Council for Intellectual Disability
NSW Teachers Federation
Older Women's Network NSW
Paul Ramsay Foundation
Peninsula Lighthouse Ltd
Peninsula Social Justice Alliance
Phunktional Arts
Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Reconciliation NSW
Redfern Legal Centre
Redfern Youth Connect
Refugee Advice and Casework Service

Regional Youth Development Opportunities Network
Relationships Australia NSW
Rev Bill Crews Foundation
Save The Children + 54 Reasons
Settlement Services International
SHINE for Kids
Southern Youth and Family Services
SpeakOut - Immigrant Women's
SpeakOut Association of NSW Inc.
St Francis Social Services
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
Streetwork Australia Limited
The Parenthood
The Shopfront Youth Legal Centre
The Twenty Ten Association
Uniting Church in Australia Synod of NSW and the ACT
Uniting NSW.ACT
UnLtd
UNSW Centre for Criminology Law and Justice
Voice from the Heart Alliance
Weave Youth & Community Services
Wesley Mission
Western NSW Community Legal Centre
Western Sydney Community Forum
Western Sydney University Justice Clinic
Women Up North Housing Inc
Women's Health NSW
Women's Legal Service NSW
Womens Reconciliation Network
Y Foundations
Youth Action
Youth Off The Streets

Representatives from Raise the Age NSW are available to give evidence to the Inquiry and look forward to the opportunity. The Inquiry is due to report back to the NSW Parliament in February 2025.

The full Raise the Age NSW submission is available [here](#).

Please attribute the following quotes to each of the spokespeople:

Karly Warner, CEO, Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Ltd:

'Communities will not be made safer by so-called "tough on crime" policies which actually make crime worse. Instead of handcuffing, arresting, strip-searching and imprisoning kids as young as 10, the NSW Government must replace punishment with prevention and invest in the solutions that we know work.'

John Leha, CEO, AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation:

'We urgently call on the NSW Government to empower Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, recognising that their role extends beyond service provision to fostering healing and self-determination.'

'By investing in early intervention, education, and targeted interventions from childhood, we can avert the societal and economic burdens of crime. Guiding our strategies with evidence, not expediency, and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14, will protect our youth's futures.'

'These measures are crucial in nurturing rather than penalising, leading to safer, more inclusive communities and ensuring justice and brighter futures for our vulnerable Aboriginal children.'

Blake Cansdale, National Director, ANTAR:

'Whether you consider this a matter of human decency or a matter of evidence-based policy making, we must raise the age of criminal responsibility, it's the right thing to do on all counts.'

'It's outrageous we are still talking about this, and the NSW Government has not acted. No child is inherently criminal, and the injustice clearly lies in how our society fails children so inconceivably. Our children deserve better.'

Angus McFarland, Branch Secretary, Australian Services Union NSW ACT Services Branch (ASU):

'ASU members work in community based frontline services across metropolitan, regional and rural NSW.'

'Our members work in organisations that provide lifesaving and life changing support for children and their families through some terrible times in their lives, including family violence, poverty, and homelessness.'

'Our members are experienced professionals, who often live in the same communities where they work. They know what does and does not work in their communities.'

'Locking up children has never been the way to make communities safe.'

'We need to invest in communities, to provide those essential services and resources, so that children, their families, and communities can grow and develop in a healthy and safe way.

'That's why we're asking the NSW Government to raise the age of responsibility and invest in communities as the best way to make communities safe.'

Sarah Marland, Executive Director, Community Legal Centres NSW:

'Raising the age of criminal responsibility is a crucial step in prioritising the wellbeing of our children. Early contact with the criminal justice system can have lasting negative impacts, so we need to be guided by the evidence and invest in support systems for children, their families and communities. It's time to act in the best interests of our children to build a fairer and more just society.'

Geoff Scott, CEO, Just Reinvest NSW:

'The NSW Government should reconsider its intention to create more punitive approaches to youth crime by investing in Aboriginal community-led "justice circuit breakers" in collaboration with services such as police, health, legal and education.

'We already know that prison is not the answer. It creates more trauma and perpetuates a cycle of dangerous behaviours that are passed on to the next generation.

'Criminalising young people under the age of 14 often leads to life-long involvement with the criminal justice system, causing inter-generational hurt and trauma for the young person, their families, and the entire community.

'Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 is an opportunity to stop this involvement and invest in placed-based solutions that are not only better for the welfare of our kids and their families, but will also build safer communities.'

Dr. Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative:

'Jailing is failing our kids and communities. Safe communities support kids to learn and grow and provide them with services and supports proven to work if they go off track.

'Raising the age is one way we can keep more kids out of detention – and we know that keeping kids out of detention is good for kids, for families and for community safety.

'There are proven alternatives to the punitive approaches we currently take. We need to expand them, to invest in them, to back them in for the good of children and communities across NSW.'

Cara Varian, CEO, NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS):

‘We all want communities to be safe, and we need to keep kids out of the criminal system. A purely punitive system does not work. We require a holistic approach that invests in critical community services that prevent crime from the start.

‘Ensuring that services such as youth and family support services, homelessness, and mental health are funded adequately and available to all communities in regional and rural NSW will help kids get the support they need to thrive.’

Lydia Shelly, President, NSW Council for Civil Liberties.

‘When young children are forced through a criminal legal process, their health, wellbeing, and future is put at risk. Punitive approaches simply don’t work, and we know this. Locking children up is not a solution.

‘There is often a misconception that youth crime is growing and ‘out-of-control’ when the reality is that youth crime in NSW is generally declining. We need to raise the age of criminal responsibility and take care of our kids.’

Henry Rajendra, President, NSW Teachers Federation:

‘The minimum age of criminal responsibility must be raised from 10 to at least 14 if we are serious about giving all children a decent shot at life. Children should be in school, learning and thriving.

‘Public education is the greatest antidote to inequality. By investing in public schools and preschools and giving all schools in all communities the funding they need, we can support children to learn, develop and grow.’

Jonathon Hunyor, CEO, Public Interest Advocacy Centre:

‘Policing and locking up 10-year-olds does not make communities safer. When kids get their life lessons from juvenile detention, that sets them up to fail.

‘Safe communities prevent crime by addressing its causes, supporting their kids with services to help them thrive. Communities and children will be safer when we invest in them and raise the age.’

Kate Munro, CEO, Youth Action:

‘The NSW Government has a real opportunity to do much better for young people and for communities. Raising the age opens up the chance to invest in children, young people, families and communities in ways that make things better for all, not worse.

‘There are fantastic services and workers across NSW who with additional resourcing could expand the way they work – to work with younger children, to offer services and programs after hours and on weekends, and to work together for better outcomes for all of us. Raising the age is a circuit breaker the NSW Government should embrace.’

The following people are available for comment or interviews:

Karly Warner **Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT**
Geoff Scott **Just Reinvest NSW**
Blake Cansdale **ANTAR**
Dr. Mindy Sotiri **Justice Reform Initiative**
Jonathon Hunyor **Public Interest Advocacy Centre**
Cara Varian **NCOSS**
Angus McFarland **ASU NSW and ACT**
Henry Rajendra **NSW Teachers Federation**

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This release is available [here](#).

[Join the Raise the Age NSW campaign.](#)

