

Friday, 2 March 2018

NT Gov urged to act immediately to raise age of criminal responsibility, other States should follow

The Law Council of Australia today urged the NT Government to go beyond offering ‘in-principle’ support to the NT Royal Commission’s landmark recommendation to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12, calling for its urgent adoption.

The NT Government’s qualified support was outlined its [response](#) to the Royal Commission, where it supported, in some form, all 227 recommendations but stopped short of committing new funding outside of the \$70 million detention center already announced.

The response also included ‘in-principle’ support for another major recommendation that no child under 14 should be sentenced to detention, except in the most serious cases.

President of the Law Council, Morry Bailes, said that while the overwhelming support for the recommendations is welcome, the difference between ‘in-principle’ support and ‘full’ support is not lost on the peak legal body.

“We urge the NT Government to push forward and fully implement these landmark recommendations as a matter of priority,” Mr Bailes said.

“Children belong in their communities, with their families and support networks, not in detention. The detention of children should be a last resort and never a first-step.

“Raising the age of criminal responsibly will radically change how the criminal justice system views the criminality of some of our youngest and most vulnerable children.”

Mr Bailes said the Law Council has previously recommended raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 12, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“We not only urge the NT Government to immediately implement these recommendations, but also other States and Territories around Australia,” Mr Bailes said.

“Unfortunately, the Federal Government’s earlier [response](#) to the Royal Commission was a missed opportunity to deliver a national, comprehensive, intergovernmental response.

“Despite the Federal response, which we hope is revisited, there’s no reason why States and Territories cannot implement recommendations such as raising the age of criminal responsibility.

“We also call on the Federal Government to support the NT in implementing the 10 recommendations identified as requiring Commonwealth action.”

Mr Bailes also repeated his call for justice targets to be put back on the national agenda.

“These targets will help drive change among all Australian governments by outlining clear markers for improvement and creating accountability for falling short.

“The Change the Record Coalition’s [Blueprint for Change](#) outlines targets such as: closing the gap in the rates of imprisonment by 2040 and cutting disproportionate rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,” Mr Bailes said.

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