

Open Letter to the Premier

From Smart Justice for Young People and community organisations across Victoria and Australia

Dear Premier,

We, the undersigned community organisations, write to express our deep concern and strong opposition to the Victorian Government's proposed youth justice changes, which would allow children as young as 14 to be sentenced in adult courts and face life imprisonment.

These proposals represent a serious step backwards for Victoria. They ignore strong evidence about child development, rehabilitation and human rights, and will cause lifelong harm while making our communities less safe.

Punishment is not prevention

The evidence is clear: harsher penalties and adult sentencing do not deter youth offending or improve community safety. Instead, they increase trauma, reoffending and long-term disadvantage. Children, especially those who have experienced abuse, neglect, disability, family violence, homelessness or exploitation, need support and rehabilitation, not prisons.

The [Sentencing Advisory Council](#) has confirmed that children are developmentally different from adults: they are more impulsive, less able to assess consequences, and far more capable of change. Treating children as adults contradicts this evidence.

Children deserve care, not prison cells

These proposals breach Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which require that imprisonment be a last resort and that children be treated according to their developmental capacity. These reforms prioritise punishment over evidence and human rights, echoing recent Queensland changes [acknowledged](#) as unnecessarily harsh and inconsistent with international standards.

They will disproportionately harm Aboriginal children, children in out of home care and children from cultural backgrounds already overrepresented in the criminal legal system due to systemic failures in housing, education, health and child protection.

Community safety comes from support not incarceration

Real community safety comes from addressing the causes of youth offending: poverty, trauma, racism, social isolation and lack of support.

Community-led, culturally safe and trauma-informed programs keep children connected to school, family and culture and reduce reoffending. These services work, yet they remain critically under-funded while prison and police budgets grow.

Victoria must invest in early intervention, diversion and prevention – not measures that entrench cycles of harm.

A call for leadership

We urge you to halt these proposed laws and engage in genuine consultation with Aboriginal leaders, community organisations, legal experts and young people.

Victoria should be known for fairness and compassion, not sentencing children to life in prison.

Signed (25 November 2025),

Aboriginal Housing
Victoria



Aboriginal & Torres
Straight Islander Legal
Service (QLD) Ltd



Aboriginal Legal Service
of Western Australia



Victorian Aboriginal
Housing and
Homelessness Forum



Djirra



Federation of Victorian
Traditional Owner
Corporations



Indigenous Law and
Justice Hub



Indigenous Social Justice
Association - Melbourne



Koorie Youth Council
(KYC)



Lidia Thorpe - Senator for
Victoria



Loddon Mallee Aboriginal
Reference Group



Ngwala Willumbong
Aboriginal Corporation



Sisters Inside



SNAICC - National Voice
for our Children



Victorian Aboriginal Child
and Community Agency



Victorian Aboriginal
Community Controlled
Health Organisation –
Centre of Excellence for
Aboriginal Families
Wellbeing



Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service



Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance Ltd



54 Reasons - Proudly Part of Save the Children Australia



Australian Education Union Victorian Branch



Allied Justice



Alternative First Responders Campaign



Angus Cameron and Partners



ANTaR Victoria



ARACY



ARC Justice



ASRC



Australian Services Union - Vic/Tas Authorities & Services Branch



Australian Lawyers for Human Rights



Australian Lawyers Alliance Limited



Barwon Community Legal Service



Bendigo Community Health Service



Brotherhood of St. Laurence



Centre Against Racial Profiling



Centre for Non-Violence



Centre for Innovative Justice



Civil Liberties Australia



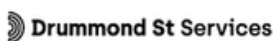
Centre for Multicultural Youth



Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd



Drummond Street Services



Federation of Community Legal Centres



Formerly Incarcerated Girls Justice Advocates Melbourne (FIGJAM)



First Step Legal



Flat Out



Fitzroy Legal Service



Foundation for Young Australians



Gippsland Community Legal Service



Human Rights Law Centre



Hume Riverina Community Legal Service



Inner Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network



Inner Melbourne Community Legal



inTouch



James Dowsley & Associates



Justice Reform Initiative



Jesuit Social Services



Junction Support Services



Justice Connect



Kids First Australia



Knowmore Legal Service



Law and Advocacy Centre for Women



Liberty Victoria



Marshall Jovanovska Ralph Criminal Lawyers



Melbourne City Mission



Mental Health Legal Centre Inc.



Moonee Valley Legal Service



National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse



National Justice Project



Northern Community Legal Centre



Orygen



OzChild



Police Accountability Project



Peninsula Community
Legal Centre



Prison Network



Robinson Gill Lawyers



Smart Justice for Young
People



South-East Monash
Legal Service



Southport Community
Legal Service



Southside Justice



The Drum Youth Services



The National Network of
Incarcerated and
Formerly Incarcerated
Women and Girls



Uniting Church Synod of
Victoria and Tasmania



Victorian Alcohol and
Drug Association



Vacro



Victorian Council of
Social Service



Villamanta Disability
Rights Legal Service



Women and Mentoring



WestJustice



Women's Legal Service
Victoria



Youth Affairs Council
Victoria



Youthlaw



Youth Support &
Advocacy Service



Eastern Community
Legal Centre



No To Violence



Pola Practice



Child and Family Services
- Ballarat (CAFS)



West Heidelberg
Community Legal



Nas Recovery Centre Ltd



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ShantiWorks



Les Twentyman
Foundation

LES TWENTYMAN
FOUNDATION

Centre for Excellence in
Child and Family Welfare



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