



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility)
Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety
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Submission regarding the Inquiry into Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

The Youth Coalition of the ACT congratulates the ACT Government for raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR). This reform signals a clear commitment to make evidence informed changes to legislation, policies, and practice. We welcome the opportunity to continue to be involved in the process of informing, supporting, and co-designing these reforms.

We support the introduction of the *Age of Criminal Responsibility Legislation Amendment Bill 2023*. This submission complements our previous submissions regarding the age of criminal responsibility. This submission draws attention to (1) ensuring the clarity, purpose and function of the Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People and (2) highlights that the efficacy of these reforms relies on a robust service system. The immediate and ongoing benefits of these reforms are contingent on these two aspects. While not directly relating to the proposed Bill, we take this opportunity to highlight the need for a robust services system.

It is imperative that the Bill, and the implementation of the reforms, support and enable robust mechanisms for supporting and meeting the needs of children, young people and families that would previously have been involved in the justice system. **The Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People (the Panel) plays a vital oversight role in both individual and system monitoring that will ensure the ongoing efficacy of these reforms in practice.** It is vital that the Panel is given the authority and enabling environment to allow it to provide this essential role. It has the potential to create a multi-disciplinary therapeutic mechanism to optimise the resources and supports across Directorate and sector boundaries and create an effective outcome oriented integrated system. An integrated and effective service systems can only be created and sustained with diligent oversight and ongoing effort. Therefore, it is essential that the Panel's role and function is clear.

The introduction and adequate resourcing of the new and enhanced services for children, young people and families is essential to raising the MACR. New and enhanced services will be needed to address the needs of the young people and families to support them towards pro-social activities and interventions. These services must be able to address a crisis response, medium and long-term supports that ensure early intervention and prevention. The value of these services will be both immediate and long-term, benefiting the whole community. However, they must be adequately funded and supported to enable this return on investment.

The development and implementation of services, supports and processes will take time and need to be thorough and robust, including embedding monitoring and evaluation. For this reason, **the Youth Coalition supports the staggered approach to raising the age.** This staged approach aligns with the current implementation science evidence-base, which outline the necessary phases and approach to develop, implement and launch effective services in a timely manner that can meet the needs of the community.

We cannot understate that the efficacy of implementing the proposed amendments is contingent on there being supports and services in the community to refer to, and which can action appropriate therapeutic supports for children, young people and families. **Evidence informed policy and practice requires evidence informed funding decisions.** Interventions that are supported by evidence need to be resourced in line with best practice.

We look forward to future consultation and involvement in progressing this landmark legislation and service response.

Kind regards,



Dr Justin Barker
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Coalition of the ACT

