



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr Peter Cain MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson (Deputy Chair), Mr Andrew Braddock MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

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

**Submission Number: 009**

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## Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

ACT Legislative Assembly

GPO Box 1020

Canberra ACT 2601

5<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Dear Standing Committee

### **Re: Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the ACT Government's Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which will raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years by 1 July 2025. The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria, representing more than 150 community service organisations, students, and individuals working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care. Many of our members work with children and young people who have experienced significant childhood adversities and who have become caught up in the criminal justice system. We commend the ACT Government for its commitment to preventing the early criminalisation of children.

Raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years of age is consistent with an extensive body of international evidence that highlights the profound and often life-long impacts of criminalisation on young children. In Australia, this issue disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Criminalising children who have experienced vulnerabilities in their young lives – trauma, neglect, intergenerational trauma in the case of First Nations children and young people, mental health challenges – is a violation of their human rights. As a signatory to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, Australia has an obligation to protect our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Primary prevention, early intervention, and alternatives to incarceration are necessary to break cycles of reoffending and imprisonment.

All Australian children have the right to reach their full potential, and to thrive within safe and healthy communities. We look forward to seeing the ACT government make this significant bill amendment that will ensure future generations of young people can be nurtured, safe, and kept away from prison.

Sincerely,



Deb Tsorbaris

Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare