



Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022-2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA

Reference: Hearing on 14 November 2023, Annual Report of Community Services Directorate

In relation to: Youth Justice Policy and Services and Responses to Spike in Youth Offending

Two figures in the Annual Report indicate a spike of young people entering the youth justice system. First, p. 420 of the Annual Report mentions a 'significant increase' in the number of youth justice case plans required, surging from only 23 young people starting supervised sentenced orders in 2021–22 (2022 AR, p. 399, note 2) to 49 starting such orders last year (p. 420). Second, p. 431 of the Annual Report shows that CYPS made 948 youth justice-related appearances in courts last year, an 80 per cent increase over the 525 appearances in 2021–22 (2022 AR, p. 431). In addition, the annual number of youth custody days has almost doubled, from 3,348 three years ago to 4,154 two years ago and now to 6,672 last year (p. 419).

1. According to the Annual Report, 'the ACT Government's overall approach to youth justice and its focus [are] on prevention, early intervention and diversion' (p. 59). Prevention and early intervention, of course, require an informed understanding of what is driving youth offending. Can the minister please explain the individual factors that the government understands to be driving this spike of young people entering the youth justice system?
2. Based on these factors, what specific actions is the ACT Government taking to prevent youth crime and to intervene early to reverse this increase in young people above the age of 12 who are entering the youth justice system?
3. So far, has the upward trend of young people entering the youth justice system continued in 2023-24, plateaued, or declined? (Please provide figures.)

Minister Davidson: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

1. Data over the previous 10 years (2011-12 to 2021-22) in the ACT demonstrates significant declines in both the number of young people under community-based supervision (47 per cent decline, from 215 to 114 young people) and in the number of young people in detention (45 per cent decline, from 134 to 74 young people). There was a spike in number of young people experiencing supervision in 2017-18 and 2018-19, before a further decline between 2019-20 and 2021-22. This trend shows that fewer young people overall are entering or coming into contact with the youth justice system. Data fluctuations year to year are largely due to the small numbers of young people who are sentenced to a period of community-based or detention supervision in the ACT.

Individual factors driving the spike in young people entering the justice system may include:

- Active police program targeting recidivism (e.g. TORIC)
 - The nature and severity of the charges are resulting in longer periods of remand and sentence.
2. The next stage of youth justice reform for the ACT will have a renewed focus on diversion from the justice system, including through implementing a new minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR). This major reform will yield positive outcomes across the youth justice system, reducing the number of young people who come in contact with the system at an early age.

In the 2023-24 ACT Budget, the Government announced investment of \$10.4 million over 4 years for a suite of early support and therapeutic services to support the legislative reform to raise the MACR. This will include funding for an ongoing Functional Family Therapy – Youth Justice program, establishment of a Therapeutic Support Panel and intensive case management and support services for young people.

The ACT Government has recently undertaken two procurement activities to establish services to support the MACR ecosystem. The Safer Youth Response Program will provide crisis and ongoing case management to children and young people in contact with ACT Policing. Functional Family Therapy - Youth Justice will provide diversionary support for young people and their families to prevent contact with the youth justice system.

3. The number of young people in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre on an average month for 2023-24 to date is as follows:

2023-24

	July	August	September	October
Average number of young people in detention	14	14	12	17

There has been an average of 14 young people in detention per month from 1 July 2023 to 31 October 2023.

When compared to data from the 2022-23 financial year, the data available for 1 July 2023 to 31 October 2023 indicates a decline in the average number of young people in detention.

Please note: this is an average for the first quarter 2023-24 this will need to be reviewed at the end of 2023-24 financial year.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

Signature: 

Date: 28/11/23

By the Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Ms Emma Davidson MLA