

Media Release

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Don Dale and beyond: A broken juvenile justice system is failing our kids across the nation.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd is appalled and concerned by yet more reports of alleged mistreatment of vulnerable youth, this time from within the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre and Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville.

ATSILS CEO Shane Duffy said, "The graphic vision aired on last night's ABC 730 and Lateline is yet another shocking reminder of a broken youth justice system failing our kids."

"A culture of cover-ups and inaction has allowed a sadistic brutality to fester in these facilities. It is totally unacceptable that our young people are being subjected to this type of traumatic and abusive treatment whilst under the care of the state."

"With reports of unacceptable mistreatment continuing to emerge from various states across the country it's quite clear we have a national problem that must be met with a national response."

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people continue to be grossly over-represented in the juvenile justice system in Queensland as is the case nationally."

"At the Cleveland facility for example, our young people are reported to make up 89% of the detainees on an average day. Nationally our youth are 24 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous youth."

"You must start to ask yourself where is the consideration that detention of young people be only used as a measure of last resort."

"Whilst we commend the decision to establish a Royal Commission into juvenile detention in the Northern Territory we call for reviews into youth detention to be extended to all jurisdictions across the country."

"As a matter of urgency we call for the minimum age of criminal responsibility to be raised to 12 and for the Queensland Government to amend legislation that currently sees 17 year olds locked up in adult prisons. The only state in Australia to do so."

"As an added protection for all vulnerable children in detention, we must ratify of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) to facilitate the independent monitoring of all places of detention."

"It is no secret we have been down the road of inquiry many times before with the likes of the Forde Inquiry and the RCIADIC without much change. The spiraling rates at which our people continue to be over-represented in the child, juvenile and criminal justice system are an alarming reminder of the price inaction on prior recommendations and the need for greater Government commitment to bring about real change," Mr. Duffy said.

It is time for all levels of government to work together and invest in coordinated intervention, diversion and rehabilitation initiatives that can help our young people build a brighter future and address the appalling rates at which our people are being imprisoned. ATSILS calls on all levels of government commit to an evidence based approach to justice reinvestment outlined in the Change the Record Coalition's "Blueprint for Change". <https://changetherecord.org.au/blueprint-for-change>

Media Contact:

Josh Herd - [Joshua Herd joshua.herd@atsils.org.au](mailto:joshua.herd@atsils.org.au)

Phone: 0439 561 775