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NT youth justice investment applauded, Gov must not lose sight of raising age of criminal responsibility

The Law Council of Australia has welcomed the NT Government's \$229.6 million investment for child protection and youth justice but has repeated its call for the NT Government to give priority to raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 and not detaining children under 14.

The NT Government's five-year [implementation plan](#), includes investments for: replacing Don Dale and Alice Springs Youth Detentions Centres; a new information technology system; expanding Child and Family Centres; diverting young people from crime and future offending; and empowering local decision making and community led reform.

Law Council of Australia President, Morry Bailes, said the peak legal body supported the new initiatives, particularly those relating to prevention, diversion and community led reform.

"There is no doubt that the extremely high rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment is linked to punitive criminal justice measures that bring them into contact with the justice system at a very young age.

"Approaches that prioritise diversion and take into account underlying causes of offending, are a vital means of providing alternatives to imprisonment and creating opportunities for rehabilitation.

"Similarly, as the [Royal Commission](#) found, community engagement and reform are critical to resolving issues in care, protection and youth justice," Mr Bailes said.

Yet Mr Bailes said that it is important that the implementation plan is not undermined by any perception that the NT Government is dragging its feet in implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations relating to raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 and not detaining children under 14, except in the most serious of cases.

"We understand that the NT Government has a process underway to look at these two landmark recommendations, but we must reiterate that they are at the centre of meaningful and lasting change for the Territory," Mr Bailes said.

"Raising the age of criminal responsibly will radically change how the criminal justice system responds to our youngest and most vulnerable children.

"Detaining children unnecessarily exposes them to the criminal justice system. This in turn dramatically increases their chances of becoming repeat offenders.

"Locking-up children should always be a last resort.

"We not only urge the NT Government to implement these crucial recommendations, but also other states and territories," Mr Bailes said.

It is now important that the Australian Government works alongside the NT Government in implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations.

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