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## **Report paves way for a youth justice system that helps, not harms, Aboriginal children: Jesuit Social Services**

A new report, tabled in the Victorian Parliament today by the Commission for Children and Young People, highlights a range of potential reforms that would prevent Aboriginal children from having contact with the youth justice system and ensure that children who have contact with the system are given every opportunity to lead positive futures, says Jesuit Social Services.

“The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the youth justice system is a national shame that requires urgent action from political leaders across the country. Here in Victoria, Aboriginal children and young people are nine times more likely than non-Aboriginal children and young people to be in youth justice custody and 10 times more likely to be subject to community-based supervision,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“This report outlines that Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria continue to be disproportionately targeted by police, sentenced by courts, and removed from families and communities. While the report focuses on Victoria, we know these systemic problems are not isolated to Victoria, and are present in other jurisdictions across the country.”

The report highlights a range of challenges experienced by some Aboriginal children and young people, which impact their involvement with the youth justice system, including fragmented contact with education, mental health problems and substance use, involvement with the child protection system and family disadvantage.

“The Commission states that the foundations of the youth justice system need to be reset to give Aboriginal children and young people the best chance to lead healthy, positive lives. Addressing intergenerational challenges will take long-term work, but this report provides a range of suggested reforms that can be implemented in the short-term and make a tangible positive difference to current and future generations,” says Ms Edwards.

“This includes raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, which Jesuit Social Services has long advocated for. Primary school aged children belong in the classroom, not in prison. The fact Australia incarcerates children as young as 10 is out of step with human rights standards, medical science on child development and international best practice, and it disproportionately impacts Aboriginal children.

“Jesuit Social Services also supports other recommendations proposed in the report, such as increasing the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to design, coordinate and deliver support services to children and young people; prioritising early intervention and diversion processes at all points of the system; and the funding of family support programs to address disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal children and young people involved with the youth justice system.

“This report paves the way for a youth justice system that will ultimately help, not harm, Aboriginal children and young people and create stronger and more cohesive communities for all.”

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