**MEDIA RELEASE**
Petition delivered to WA Government issues powerful call to stop jailing children

* A petition signed by more than 15,200 West Australians calling on the WA Government to Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility has been handed over to WA Attorney-General John Quigley.
* Right now, under WA law, children as young as 10 years old can be arrested, sent to court and locked away in prison.
* The WA Government is expected to reveal its plan to Raise the Age at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General meeting in December.
* Social Reinvestment WA has led the campaign to Raise the Age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 for three years.
* The group of organisations hope the historic moment will ignite real change in WA’s failing justice system.

In a landmark moment for youth justice reform, Social Reinvestment WA and members of their 30+ organisation coalition have handed over their petition to Raise the Age of criminal responsibility to the Attorney-General.

The petition contains the voices of more than 15,231 West Australians who support the calls of the growing chorus of experts to stop jailing children.

Given the tragic news of WA’s first child death in youth detention since modern records began, calls for urgent reform are only growing louder.

The handover comes ahead of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General meeting in December, where WA is expected to reveal its plans on raising the age.

Right now, under WA law, children as young as 10 can be arrested, sent to court and locked away in a prison cell.

This goes against the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Raising the Age would be a small but monumental step toward fixing WA’s crisis in youth justice; Diverting primary school children before circumstances spiral further and reducing the population in Banksia Hill.

Investing in the alternatives that work to provide children with the supports they need to address the underlying causes of offending is the way forward.

It would bring WA into the 21st century, and in line with medical and legal expert opinion, and global standards while providing real hope for a fairer future for children and their families.

Giving 10-, 11-, 12- and 13-year-olds a chance at support in their communities instead of cells leads to a real chance at breaking the cycle of offending and incarceration.

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**Quotes from the 30+ member organisations of Social Reinvestment WA**

**Comments attributable to Sophie Stewart - Principal Manager, SRWA**

*“In WA you can’t vote until 18, you can’t get a license until 16, you can’t get a job until 13. So why on earth are we still criminalising children as young as ten? A plethora of evidence and expertise supports the case for raising the age, and the earlier we can rehabilitate and support struggling children, the better chance we have of creating long lasting positive outcomes for them and the wider community. It is high time the WA government listened to the chorus of voices and fixed their failed youth justice system.”*

**Comments attributable to Glenda Kickett - Co-Chair, SRWA**

*“Children are our future. They should be in community, on Country, and with their family – not locked up in prisons.”*

**Comments attributable to Daniel Morrison-Bird – CEO, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and Co-Chair, SRWA**

*"Children under the age of 14 need help and support, with effective systems to identify and respond to their needs – sending them to detention is not what that looks like and only leads to poor outcomes.*

*It is fair and reasonable to ask the Government to commit to Raising the Age and finding alternative treatment options for the handful of children under the age of 14 facing detention."*

**Comments attributable to Louise Giolitto - CEO, WA Council of Social Services**

*“I have nieces and nephews that are 11 and 12. I find it unimaginable, and it breaks my heart that they could be sent to prison for mistakes they make as children. History tells us that tearing children away from their families is not the solution.”*

**Comments attributable to Peter Ruzyla – CEO, Whitelion Youth Agency**

*“Incarceration of young people represents the system’s failure to address the underlying causes of youth crime. Locking young children up, some in the adult prison system, is a response that no child should have to suffer and no civil society should tolerate. Youth justice reform requires an immediate closure of Unit 18, significant reform of practice at Banksia Hill and an increase in the age of criminalisation of young people.”*

**Comments attributable to Jennie Burns - Executive Director of Family and Community Services, MercyCare**

*“Children need opportunities to thrive and grow. At ten years of age, children are still developing their cognitive abilities and their decision-making skills, and need support, not punishment. Our experience and work with children and young people tells us that ten is too young to be locked up and therefore we support raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14.”*

**Comments attributable to Chelsea McKinney – CEO, Community Legal WA**

*“The WA Government needs to implement the solutions and alternatives that experts in this field, Aboriginal Elders and community leaders are advocating. We want the government to listen to the Supreme Court, who has ruled that locking children up for over 20 hours a day alone in a cell is illegal. We need a youth justice system that supports and rehabilitates young people, not causes further harm.”*

**Comments attributable to Wayne Nannup – CEO, Aboriginal Legal Service of WA Ltd (ALSWA)**

*“The current system is failing our children, and the age of criminal responsibility must be raised to 14. It’s abhorrent that children as young as Grades 4 or 5 are locked up in prison cells in Australia.*

*Jailing children is not the answer. If anything, it will only set them up for a future that leads straight into the adult prison system. From a First Nations perspective, our people are already disproportionately impacted. It’s time for Australia to protect the rights of the child, reverse the over-representation of Indigenous children in custody and raise the age of criminal responsibility”.*

**Comments attributable to Emma Jarvis – CEO, Palmerston**

*“Children as young as 10 years old are in year 5 at school. They have just finished loosing their baby teeth and are about to start puberty. Children need safety, connection and care to learn, develop and grow. This does not happen when they are incarcerated. Palmerston fully supports the raise the age campaign.”*

**Comments attributable to Kimberley Wilde – WA Advocacy and Campaign Coordinator, Justice Reform Initiative**

*“If we want to build safer communities, rather than ‘managing’ children in the justice system, we need to invest in community-led alternatives. There is an opportunity right now for all sides of politics in Western Australia to show real leadership by Raising the Age to 14 and committing to resourcing the evidence-based alternatives that we know will build a safer community for everybody.”*

**Comments attributable to Wendy Rose – CEO, Kin Advocacy**

*“Young children are continuing to be traumatised and disadvantaged in a system that is broken. It is distressing that adolescents are being placed in solitary confinement, a punishment that is usually metered out by authoritarian regimes. This is being done in our name.”*

**Comments attributable to Jill Rundle – CEO, WANADA**

*“All children deserve to access the support they need to flourish. But right now, children as young as 10 – many living with neuro-disabilities such as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – are being locked up, with limited support, despite strong evidence advising against this. WANADA supports the WA Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14, and foster a culture change in our youth justice system to focus on rehabilitation.”*

**Comments attributable to Debra Zanella – CEO, RUAH Community Services**

*“Locking up children as young as 10 contradicts the fundamental principles of rehabilitation and support that should be at the core of our youth justice approach. A recent report highlights the daily cost of detention at $2,184 per day, roughly equivalent to $488,735 per child for one year. Imagine the positive impact that same investment could have by addressing the underlying disadvantage and trauma these children have often faced and give them a chance to change their future. We must do better by our kids.”*

**Comments attributable to Amanda Hunt – WA State Director, 54 Reasons**

*“Children should be in their communities, not in prison cells. We know that trauma-informed treatment and community-based alternatives to detention are more compassionate – and effective – responses to offending behaviour for 10-13 year olds. Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 is the bare minimum we should do to protect children in the youth justice system. Going one step further and taking a child rights approach would have threefold benefits: better outcomes for children, improved community safety and lower costs for taxpayers.”*

**Comments attributable to Adj. Prof. Tony Pietropiccolo AM – Director, Centrecare Inc.**

*“We can’t continue to criminalise children as young as 10 in WA. Children expect us adults to do what we can to ensure their wellbeing. The current approach that sees young children incarcerated demeans them, adds to their difficulties and undermines their future opportunities. We must provide our children with all they need to succeed, even when we find their behaviours unacceptable. Raising the age of criminal responsibility to age 14 is the least we can do.”*

**Comments attributable to Lisa Cunningham – CEO, Waalitj Foundation**

*“Children need support and guidance as they develop, so for them to be incarcerated at such a young age is appalling. I believe that working with children and their families in a holistic manner is the way for them to reach their full potential.”*

**Comments attributable to Shane Mauger – Managing Director, Outcare**

*“The largest yoke we can put around a child’s neck is the stigma of incarceration, the limitation of education and the confirmation that they are not valued or loved by separating them from their family, friends and community. Rasing the age makes us, the community, responsible for changing how we think and creating positive environments for children, not put the responsibility on the child and how they interact in the environments we have created for them. Incarceration and lifelong punishment are not the answer because if it was, the system would be working, not getting worse.”*

**Comments attributable to Claire Robbs – Chief Executive, Life Without Barriers**

*“Children under the age of 14 are minors in every other aspect of law and society – we don’t expect them to be responsible enough to drive a car or vote yet our legal system means children as young as 10-years-old can commit a crime and be placed in prison. Incarcerating children is counterproductive to our future society, and it does not work. It has been proven to entrench offending, or at best, achieve no reduction in the rate or severity of future offending. The age of criminal responsibility must be raised to a minimum of 14.”*

**Comments attributable to Rodney Dillon – Indigenous Rights Advisor, Amnesty International Australia**

*"The government and systems are not addressing issues as to why our kids are being locked up- especially issues regarding health and education. To the Australian government, we have had kids who have died under your system, and you've done nothing about it. They were already told that this would happen and so when a child dies, who are we to hold responsible? When there is a death in the workplace, someone is always held accountable for it. But who are we to hold responsible for death after death? There are kids committing suicide, who are we to hold accountable?"*

**Comments attributable to Sandy McKiernan – CEO, YACWA**

*“Medical and legal experts have been telling us for years that prison causes immense harm to children and young people. The ongoing and devastating reports of human rights violations inflicted on young people in Banksia Hill and Unit 18 clearly reflect this. The Western Australian Government must be held accountable for its management of WA’s youth justice system to ensure that the tragedies happening inside it – including a child death in custody two weeks ago, and consistently high rates of self-harm - never happen again.”*

**Comments attributable to Maggie Munn (they/them) - National Director, Change the Record**

*“Children under the age of 14 are minors in every other aspect of law and society – we don’t expect them to be responsible enough to drive a car or vote yet our legal system means children as young as 10-years-old can commit a crime and be placed in prison. Incarcerating children is counterproductive to our future society, and it does not work. It has been proven to entrench offending, or at best, achieve no reduction in the rate or severity of future offending. The age of criminal responsibility must be raised to a minimum of 14.”*

**Comments attributable to Philippa Boldy – Acting CEO, Anglicare WA**

*“Anglicare WA continues to support raising the age of criminal responsibility, together with a range of other supports and justice reform initiatives, to enable children and young people to thrive. We hope this petition signed by many will help influence this change.”*

**Comments attributable to Jim Morrison – Founder, Yokai**

*“The Western Australian government must take in to account the trauma that first nations people have been going through in the last month from a failed referendum and children dying in custody. The governments best service is humanity - not locking 10-year-olds in adult prisons.”*

**Comments attributable to Tom Penglis – Founder and Board Member, WA Justice Association**

*“The WA Government need to stop dragging their feet on this issue, which is overwhelmingly supported by medical, legal and other evidence.”*

**Comments attributable to Jody Nunn – CEO, Reconciliation WA**

*“Raising the age is a necessary step forward in WA’s journey towards justice and reconciliation. This reform is not just about the medical evidence, but the voices and futures of First Nations children and their families to break the cycle of incarceration.”*

**Comments attributable to Merinda March – CEO, Hope Community Services**

*“The criminal justice system should not be dealing with children aged 10 to 13 years old. These young people need to be with family and their community. I hope the Cook Government takes this petition as an opportunity to listen to the public and reconsider its previous position. Our youth justice approach needs to be therapeutic and community-led, trauma-informed, compassionate and importantly, close to home, not thousands of kilometres from support networks and community.”*

**ENDS**

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**About Social Reinvestment WA:**

Social Reinvestment WA is a coalition of 32 non-profit organisations campaigning since 2014 to end the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in WA’s justice system. They lead development of justice reinvestment solutions in partnership with communities and run the Raise the Age campaign in WA.

[www.socialreinvestmentwa.org.au/](http://www.socialreinvestmentwa.org.au/)

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