

**MEDIA RELEASE: Social Reinvestment calls for major youth justice reform amid revelations of physical abuse in Banksia Hill Detention Centre
14 November 2022**

- Explosive media reports released this week have highlighted the mistreatment of children in Western Australia's youth detention system.
- Newly released footage from ABC's Four Corners Investigation shows custodial officers in state's only detention centre, Banksia Hill Detention Centre, using excessive and dangerous force to restrain a child.
- The practice has been outlawed in Queensland and other jurisdictions due to its risk of serious injury, suffocation, and death.
- The news follows nearly 12 months of revelations surrounding human rights abuses at Banksia Hill and the July 2022 decision to send children to maximum security Casuarina Prison which has been widely condemned.
- High-profile community leaders have joined in condemning the McGowan Government's failed approach incarcerating children against the guidance of experts.
- Voices include former and current Inspectors of Custodial Services, former WA Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan, and former and current president of the Children's Court.
- Social Reinvestment WA supports calls by the West Australian newspaper for an urgent Summit.
- SRWA has published five key directions informed by experts to the McGowan Government to address this crisis and provide children the supports they need.

A chorus of experts across the state agree that WA's youth justice system has failed. We need urgent reforms to protect the rights of children, and keep communities safe. A new system needs to prioritise culturally and developmentally appropriate, trauma informed, and therapeutic responses in our communities, rather than prison cells. Together we can build pathways to a better future.

Social Reinvestment WA calls on the WA Government to:

1. Establish an **Independent Inquiry** into Banksia Hill and Unit 18 to restore public trust.
2. Immediately **commit to close** Unit 18, and cease human rights breaches at Banksia Hill, making the time frame and process public.
3. Partner with Aboriginal and subject matter experts to **establish a Taskforce** to:
 - a. Develop a model of care for all children who are incarcerated.
 - b. Design, implement, and oversee reforms in the youth justice system across the life course.
4. Develop and resource a **whole of government strategy** to end the pipeline to prison for young people experiencing disadvantage.
5. End the criminalization of children by **Raising the Age** of Criminal Responsibility to at least 14.

Comments attributable to Glenda Kickett, Co-Chairperson Social Reinvestment WA

"The abuse of children in a government-run environment is unconscionable. This is a place where children who have serious developmental impairments and life-long trauma should be getting the best care possible to help them rehabilitate, not being put at risk of suffocation by adults. This approach is only compounding the trauma of these young people – it does nothing for the community, for the children, for anyone."

"Youth detention is failing. The McGowan Government is ignoring experts in children's wellbeing and even the rule of law from the Supreme Court of WA has found the WA Government's approach to be unlawful. Banksia Hill Detention Centre must be urgently changed before we see the death in custody of a child."

"We need a new approach – and we have the solutions at hand. Nobody is saying these children are easy to manage, but at the end of the day they are children who are in desperate need of love and support. The Premier has been given all the advice to fix youth justice, end the abuse of children, and break the cycle for the benefit of the entire community."

Comments attributable to Daniel Morrison, Co-Chairperson Social Reinvestment WA

"The safety of children is the most important thing in any healthy community, and this week's reports are damning. This is the grim reality of how our state treats some of our most vulnerable children. Aboriginal community leaders, youth justice experts, child wellbeing experts – everyone is calling on this situation to change. We need an independent inquiry into youth justice to restore public trust."

"We must urgently fix youth detention and end the failure of Banksia Hill. A detention centre that is physically abusing vulnerable children and compounding trauma does nothing for the safety of our community. As a community we need to accept that detention has failed, and start investing our money in providing support to children and families when they need it to prevent crime before it begins."

"Premier McGowan has heard from the experts. The community is united. The McGowan Government needs to listen and adopt a new approach. Now is the time to commit to taking a new approach, to show leadership and say enough is enough."

Comments attributable to Sophie Stewart, SRWA [Campaign and Coalition] Manager

"We need government to stop playing whack-a-mole as each new crisis arises. The whole system is fundamentally broken. We need them to come to the table to develop a plan for urgent reforms to protect the rights of children, and keep communities safe. We must ensure this never happens again."

"Social Reinvestment WA as a coalition has worked with experts across youth justice, child wellbeing, and community development to build solutions that address the root causes of crime. In August 2022, we released a 100-page blueprint highlighting approaches that could fix our failed system and end the pipeline sending vulnerable children to prison."

"A new system needs to prioritise culturally and developmentally appropriate, trauma informed, and therapeutic responses in our communities, rather than prison cells. We want to work in partnership to end this human rights crisis and build pathways to a better future."

ENDS.

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