

25 June 2024

Catholic religious call for a national overhaul of child detention systems

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) has voiced grave concerns about the state of juvenile detention systems around the country to the National Children’s Commissioner, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Police Ministers Council.

The Queensland Government’s 2023 decision to suspend the State’s *Human Rights Act* to permit adult watchhouses to be used as youth detention centres has led to 80 juveniles currently being held in watchhouses, 56 of whom are First Nations children. It has been reported by the Youth Advocacy Centre that these children are being subjected to sexual abuse and mistreatment.

Purpose-built youth detention centres are also in a state of crisis, with the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings last year reporting widespread and systematic abuse against children in its Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

“Despite the Commission of Inquiry’s recommendation that the Ashley Youth Detention Centre be replaced by a therapeutic model of youth justice, the Centre remains open, with the highest number of children detained in the last decade,” said Anne Walker, CRA’s National Executive Director.

“This pattern is being repeated in New South Wales, with the State no longer on track to meet its Close the Gap target to reduce the rate of Aboriginal young people in prison by 15 per cent by 2031,” she added.

CRA also expressed deep sadness over the death of a child in detention in Western Australia, late last year.

“Prison is not an appropriate environment for children. As a society, in seeking to respond to the challenge of the young who offend, we need to focus seriously on constructive ways to support healing, rehabilitation and transformation,” CRA President, Fr Peter Jones OSA, said.

CRA urged Ms. Anne Hollands, Ms. Linda Burney and Mr Mark Dreyfus to work closely with State and Territory governments, to urgently bring about the drastically required changes needed to fully establish children’s rights within Australia’s justice system.

[Click here to read CRA’s letters.](#)

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