

## MEDIA RELEASE

16 August 2024

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### **Youth justice backflip won't protect kids or communities**

The Victorian Government's reversal of its commitment to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 by 2027 is a deeply troubling culmination of harmful rhetoric and disregard for evidence.

[Catholic Social Services Victoria \(CSSV\)](#) welcomes many aspects of the proposed [Youth Justice Bill 2024](#) that will increase the age of criminal responsibility to 12, within the context of the Government's initial commitment to raise the age to 14 by 2027. This movement would have been in line with national and international recommendations from [human rights](#), [medical](#), [legal](#) and [First Nations](#) expert groups. The reversal of the commitment works to undermine the protective capacity of the Youth Justice Bill, knowing that when children interact with the criminal justice system, it triples the chances that they will reoffend and does not foster accountability for behaviour. Instead of helping kids to get their lives back on track, detention is setting them up for a lifetime of social and economic exclusion—and this hurts all of us.

CSSV Executive Director, Josh Lourensz, says, "A punitive approach to children in the justice system will see more kids reoffending more often. This decision will not make the community safer, and it impedes enactment of an evidence-based plan to address the complex needs and experiences of disadvantage, trauma and injustice facing many children who encounter the criminal justice system. The ACT and Tasmania are making positive changes, understanding that incarceration of children under the age of 14 does not yield the desired result of safe and thriving families and communities. Victoria can and must do better than this."

CSSV affirms the important work of the [expert review panel](#) advising on the design and implementation of an Alternative Service Model to support young Victorians to stay out of the justice system, keep our communities safe and, ultimately, thrive. The work of this panel remains important in ensuring community safety, accountability for actions, and the right supports to be put in place for positive change in children's lives.

Josh Lourensz adds, "It is disappointing that at this moment in time, with the ongoing work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, that the Victorian Government has chosen to about-turn on their commitment and the Commission's recommendation to raise the age to 14. CSSV stands in solidarity with Aboriginal-led organisations in their deep concern for the children and families they support."

CSSV, alongside its member organisations and other youth justice experts, urges the Victorian Government to realign the Youth Justice Bill with the evidence and choose to support kids, and communities, to thrive.

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While we remain resolute in advocating for the age of criminal responsibility in Victoria to be raised to 14, the Government has a responsibility to intensify efforts to reduce the criminalisation of children and provide alternative pathways, regardless of the age of criminal responsibility that is passed in the Youth Justice Bill.

*Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) is a peak body for more than 40 social and community service organisations working to support the welfare of over 300,000 Victorians per year. CSSV is a member of and endorses the Raise the Age Coalition: a broad alliance of over 100 medical, legal, human rights and service delivery organisations.*

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