



MEDIA RELEASE

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CRA calls for a national overhaul of the youth justice system

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) has called for a nationally coordinated reform of the youth justice system in a recent submission to a Senate Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system.

In its submission, CRA expressed grave concerns that the current youth justice system is punitive in its approach, sidelining the dignity of the child while also failing to create safer communities.

"The detaining of children as young as 10 has long-term detrimental impacts on their health and wellbeing, and can cause the breakdown of their social systems, frequently contributing to a vicious cycle of criminal activity," said CRA President, Br. Gerard Brady CFC.

CRA strongly encouraged a nationally coordinated federal government reform of the youth justice system, refocussing the emphasis to prevention and early intervention, particularly amongst First Nations children who are significantly overrepresented in the system.

"Social determinants, such as spending time in out-of-home care as a child, experiencing poverty, and poor school education, are known to have a significant impact on the likelihood of a child ending up in the justice system and should be the primary target of the youth justice system," said Anne Walker, CRA National Executive Director.

"These social determinants are also experienced disproportionately and often simultaneously by First Nations children, contributing to their overincarceration. More genuine decision-making partnerships between state services and Aboriginal youth, their families and their communities, are long overdue to address this," she added.

Consistent government support for effective rehabilitation programs for offending children were also urged in the submission, including Restorative Justice and Prison Chaplaincy, two ministries with which CRA's members have strong histories of engagement.

"Restorative Justice and Prison Chaplaincy both create safe spaces where open and honest dialogue can take place to support healing of relationships and the child's personal and spiritual development, both addressing the child's reintegration into and flourishing within their community," said Br. Brady

"Yet, our members are reporting that government support for chaplaincy services varies across states and territories, with preference at times given to established programs over one-on-one conversation," he said.

CRA concluded that the youth justice system urgently requires the development of a nationally consistent approach that prioritises prevention and holistic rehabilitation to restore and uphold the dignity of the child.

Read CRA's [submission](#).

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