

## **Submission**

### **Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026**

I am writing this submission as a member of the community services sector. I have worked alongside children and families experiencing poverty, housing instability, mental health challenges, substance use and exposure to domestic and family violence for over 10 years in the Northern Territory and interstate.

As a community services worker I am incredibly concerned about the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026.

While I support the importance of keeping children safe I am concerned that this Bill will not increase safety as intended and will expand the involvement of the Territory Government into families lives without improving the services which they will need to increase safety. This Bill does not address the systemic barriers families are already facing to access support such as service and worker shortages, long waitlists, language barriers and lack of servicing in regional and remote areas.

For example many of the families I work with are experiencing housing instability or homelessness, both circumstances which could be viewed as causing “wellbeing concerns” for children. They may have been waiting years for their Territory Housing application to move up the allocation list or be on the waitlist for crisis accommodation with services like Yissa. The Territory Housing waitlist currently provides an expected timeframe of 6-8years for a two bedroom property in Darwin/Casuarina or 4-6years for a two bedroom Palmerston for a family on the priority waitlist. Without significant investment by the Northern Territory Government in public and affordable housing I am concerned that this Bill will place unattainable standards for families to achieve and punish them for circumstances which are outside of their control and rather caused by systemic issues.

Through my work in the community services sector I have seen firsthand how many of the issues driving child protection involvement are closely connected to poverty, housing stress, service shortages and intergenerational disadvantage, not a lack of care or love for children. I have also seen the ongoing and important connection which children have to their family even when they are going through Child Protection involvement and the out of home care system. And for Aboriginal children this connection is particularly important as this family connection also provides connection to culture. The Office of the Children’s Commissioner has noted that since 2023 it has received 44 complaints relating to family connectedness indicating a desire to be better connected with birth families and other loved ones.

I am deeply concerned that with this Bill the Northern Territory Government appears to be adopting policies which have already been found to be harmful for children and families by other states. I previously worked in Child Protection in Victoria, a state which has just this year repealed their harmful permanent laws within the child protection system acknowledging that rigid timeframes for families do not work. Victorian Legal Aid noted that these permanency laws actually increased the number of children being placed in out of home care and

disproportionately impacted Aboriginal children. If we have seen that these types of policies do not keep children safer in other states then why are we repeating them here in the Northern Territory?

Finally I want to express my concern for the speed in which this legislation is being pushed through by the Northern Territory Government. One week is an incredibly short time for stakeholders and individuals to respond and raise concerns to what are significant changes to the Northern Territory's child protection laws. This short timeframe also makes meaningful community consultation with Aboriginal communities most likely to be impacted by these changes more difficult. Given this short time period, the sector wide calls for this Bill to be scrapped by Aboriginal and community legal services [NAAJA, the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Services (NAAFLS), Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (CAAFLU) Legal Aid NT, Top End Women's Legal Service (TEWLS) Katherine Women's Information and Legal Service (KWILS), Central Australian Women's Legal Service (CAWLS) and the Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS)] should be viewed as even more significant.

As a community service worker I support the importance of child safety and recognise the need for effective child protection systems, however I do not believe that this Bill will do that.

Instead, I am concerned the Bill:

- lowers the threshold for intervention into families
- places increased pressure on an already stretched Child Protection workforce;
- expands coercive powers;
- increases pathways into long-term care;
- fails to adequately address poverty, housing instability and service shortages;
- risks causing further harm to vulnerable children, families and communities.

I join countless others in calling on the Northern Territory Government to scrap the Bill and undertake genuine consultation with Aboriginal organisations, community services, legal services, frontline workers and affected communities to develop evidence-based reforms that keep children safe by strengthening families and communities rather than expanding punitive intervention.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this.