



Submission to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee

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

Submitted by: Rachael Metcalfe

Secretary

Australian Education Union – Northern Territory (AEU NT)

Date: May 2026

Introduction

The Australian Education Union – Northern Territory (AEU NT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee on the *Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026*.

AEU NT represents educators, school leaders and education professionals who work daily with children and young people across the Northern Territory, including those in, or at risk of entering, the child protection system. Our members witness firsthand the impacts of system failures, including housing insecurity, disengagement from education, trauma, and the consequences of disconnection from family, community and culture.

We support reform that strengthens the safety, wellbeing, participation and long-term outcomes of children and young people. However, based on available evidence and the concerns raised by children and young people themselves, AEU NT does **not support the passage of the Bill in its current form**.

Key Position

AEU NT urges the Committee to recommend that:

- The Bill **is not passed in its current form**; and
- The Northern Territory Government **pause and fundamentally reconsider the reform approach**, grounded in evidence, co-design, and the lived experience of children and young people.

System Context

Educators across the NT are increasingly required to respond to the impacts of systemic issues including:

- Housing instability and homelessness among young people leaving care;

- Disconnection from family, kinship and culture;
- High levels of trauma and unmet mental health needs;
- Poor continuity of care and support services;
- Barriers to consistent school attendance and engagement.

Schools are often the only stable environment in a child's life. Legislative changes that weaken cultural connection, participation rights or family engagement will directly undermine educational outcomes and student wellbeing.

Core Concerns with the Bill

AEU NT shares broad concerns identified across the sector, particularly that the Bill:

- Weakens the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP);
- Reduces enforceable participation rights for children and families;
- Risks prioritising administrative timelines over genuine support;
- Lacks evidence of genuine consultation or co-design;
- Fails to address systemic drivers such as housing, poverty, and service access;
- Does not adequately support transitions from care into adulthood.

Recommendations

AEU NT strongly supports the following recommendations and urges the Committee to adopt them in full.

1. Consultation and Co-design

1. Undertake genuine co-design with children and young people with lived experience of care in the Northern Territory.
2. Ensure meaningful partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
3. Establish an independent Board of Inquiry with statutory powers, Aboriginal leadership, and a mandate to examine system-wide failures across child protection, housing, health, education and justice systems.

2. Cultural Connection and the ATSICPP

1. Implement a standalone Cultural Support Plan for every Aboriginal child in care, including connection to language, kinship systems, Country and cultural authority.
2. Retain the ATSICPP as a standalone, enforceable legislative framework and strengthen its implementation.

3. Prioritise culturally matched placements and expand Indigenous mentoring programs.
4. Resource and sustain connection to Country, culture and family through dedicated funding and practical supports.
5. Establish transparent accountability measures for cultural connection outcomes.

3. Kinship Placement, Reunification and Family Contact

1. Reinstate reunification as a central legislative objective.
2. Increase investment in kinship care and remove barriers to Aboriginal families becoming carers.
3. Streamline and expedite processes for family visits and connection to Country.
4. Ensure workforce stability through manageable caseloads and reduced staff turnover.

4. Participation, Accountability and Leaving Care

1. Retain and strengthen enforceable participation rights for children and young people at all stages of decision-making.
2. Extend care arrangements to at least age 21, in line with national best practice.
3. Expand and properly resource post-care support services.
4. Develop a dedicated leaving care housing strategy to prevent youth homelessness.

Implications for Education

From an education perspective, these reforms are critical. When children:

- Maintain strong cultural identity,
- Experience stable placements,
- Remain connected to family and community,
- Receive consistent support into adulthood,

They are significantly more likely to engage in education, complete schooling, and transition successfully into employment and community life.

Conversely, instability, disconnection and homelessness directly contribute to disengagement from education, behavioural challenges and long-term disadvantage.

Educators cannot compensate for systemic failure alone. Legislative reform must align with the realities observed in schools.

Conclusion

AEU NT acknowledges the intent of the Bill to improve outcomes for children and young people. However, in its current form, the Bill risks entrenching existing failures rather than addressing them.

We therefore call on the Legislative Scrutiny Committee to:

- Recommend that the Bill not be passed;
- Require a comprehensive, independent inquiry; and
- Ensure future reform is co-designed with children, families, educators, and Aboriginal communities.

Children and young people in the Northern Territory deserve reform that is evidence-based, culturally grounded, and genuinely centred on their rights, voices and futures.

Contact Rachael Metcalfe

Secretary

Australian Education Union – Northern Territory

