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22 May 2026

Legislative Scrutiny Committee
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
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Dear Committee Secretary,

Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026 - Save the Children and 54 reasons submission

Thank you for the invitation to make this submission.

This submission is from Save the Children and 54 reasons. Save the Children is a global non-government organisation that exists to uphold children's rights. 54 reasons is our Australian delivery arm. We are Australia's leading child rights organisation. We have worked in the NT for many decades, providing services for and with children, young people, families and communities.

Save the Children and 54 reasons have significant concerns about the Bill. The Bill is highly likely to:

- Increase the level of intervention and enmeshment in the statutory system experienced by children and their families and communities
- Cause more children to be removed from their families, community and culture
- Punish children and families for systemic issues that are outside their control, including the impacts of poverty and the lack of access to effective services and supports
- Reinforce the compounding adversity and disadvantage that commonly drives contact with child protection, including further entrenching trajectories from child protection to contact with youth justice and detention systems
- Undermine, rather than uphold, the best interests of children.

Families want to meet their children's needs and provide safe, nurturing environments for their children. Yet material basics necessary for an adequate standard of living – such as housing and food security – are not equitably available in the NT. Many families face significant structural barriers to accessing even these basic needs in order to protect and care for their children.

Families also need access to culturally safe and appropriate services and supports to provide for and meet the needs of their children in a safe, nurturing environment. These services and supports are not accessible in the NT at the scale that is required, or in ways that families need.

In this context, the Bill's measures to lower the threshold for intervention, introduce strict and compliance-based arrangements (family responsibility agreements and orders), and focus more on



permanency and strict reunification timeframes, will result in families being held responsible and children being removed due to systemic gaps in critical services – not due to any fault of families or matters within families’ control. This will cause significant harm.

The Bill also proposes to remove the currently legislated Aboriginal Child Placement Principle framework. Deprioritising connection to culture and community, and kinship care, is a backward and harmful step that is contrary to evidence and extensive Aboriginal-led advice about what best maintains children’s right to safety.

We are concerned that the Bill is not informed by adequate consultation with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, peak bodies, communities and leaders. Reform should be guided by Aboriginal views and expertise, in line with the right to self-determination. We note that concerns have been publicly raised about this lack of consultation by many leading Aboriginal voices and bodies.

Upholding children’s rights, including children’s best interests, should be the guiding principle for all government action relating to children, including the care and protection of children, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Bill reflects a misapprehension of what is required to uphold these vital standards and what will ensure children’s best interests and safety.

The Bill proposes to increase the level of intervention and surveillance on families, and continue the historical pattern of removing children from community and culture in circumstances where families have been let down by the systems that should be supporting them and their children. Instead, the focus of reform should be addressing these systemic issues and root causes such as poverty and intergenerational disadvantage, investing to ensure adequate and appropriate housing and support is available for families, and enabling Aboriginal leadership and communities to exercise self-determination in keeping children safe within strong, protective families and culture.

We recommend that:

- The Bill not be passed.
- The Government engage with the Northern Territory Children’s Commissioner and the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, as jointly recommended by both Commissioners,¹ with a view to a robust and effective inquiry into the systemic issues that must be addressed to uphold children’s rights and keep children safe.

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED] for any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Travis Borsi
Director (Northern Territory) – 54 reasons

¹ <https://www.ncatsicyp.gov.au/news/commissioners-call-independent-inquiry-systems-designed-protect-territorys-children>.