



Petition

Registration No.	24
Title	Requesting the Government to Address Community Safety
Presented on	17 May 2023
Presented by	Member for Karama
Referred to	Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services
Date referred	18 May 2023
Response due	25 October 2023
Response received	25 July 2023
Response presented	25 July 2023

Petition

To the Speaker and the Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory.

WE THE UNDERSIGNED RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH

Strongly urge the Northern Territory government and local leaders to work together to ensure the safety of their citizens, and we are calling for immediate action to be taken to address this issue.

Since the tragic death of a Bangladeshi student in early May 2023, community safety concerns have risen comprehensively. Citizens want to be safe at home, at work and on the roads. The incident has traumatized the whole community and community members are extremely concerned about safety and security.

The community requests immediate action and support.

Please see the attached petition.

YOUR PETITIONERS THEREFORE HUMBLY PRAY THAT

The government and the local leaders to work together with the police and justice system to address the issue and take the following steps:

- Safer accommodation.
- Safer public transport system, deploy more transit officers on the road for safer movement of travellers.
- Increase police presence and patrols in residential areas, shops and public areas to deter criminal activity.
- Cover more areas under live surveillance to detect threats and prompt action where necessary.
- Provide support to victims of crime, including counselling and financial assistance.
- Educate the community about the impact of crime and the importance of reporting suspicious behaviour.
- Increase resources and funding for community-based programs that address the root causes of crime, such as poverty, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

Response

Thank you for meeting with the Chief Minister, the Hon Natasha Fyles MLA, and me on 11 May 2023 and for delivering your petition to us. I understand the time since Sifat's death has been difficult for many people across the Territory and the country, but especially for his family, his friends and his community.

I note that 1652 people from around the world signed the petition, and acknowledge that many more than that were impacted by this loss. Upon receiving the petition, I gave my commitment to help coordinate the Northern Territory Government's response. The purpose of this letter is to address the specific concerns contained in the petition and outline the actions our Government is undertaking to improve community safety.

1. Safer Accommodation

A new student accommodation development at 7 Shepherd Street, Darwin has been approved by the Development Consent Authority (DCA). This development will have 72 rooms with the primary purpose being affordable, medium-term student accommodation. Our government is working with Charles Darwin University to discuss next steps on how to accelerate private sector developments for student accommodation.

Section 49 of the Residential Tenancy Act 1999 (RTA) provides that landlords must take reasonable steps to provide and maintain locks and other security devices that are necessary to ensure that premises are reasonably secure.

Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) runs a Territory-wide Tenants' Advice Service that provides legal advice and advocacy services to residential tenants. DCLS also publishes helpful template letters and fact sheets, including on the *Residential Tenancies Act* and repairs and maintenance.

These can be accessed at <https://www.dcls.org.au/tenants-advice/>

NT Legal Aid Commission (and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency) provide assistance with tenancy matters and Legal Aid has some housing resources available online at <https://www.legalaid.nt.gov.au/legal-information/our-publications/housing-and-money/>

The NT Consumer Affairs also provides information for landlords and tenants on their rights and responsibilities. This can be found at <https://consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au/a-guide-to-renting-in-the-northern-territory>

2. Safer public transport system, deploy more transit officers on the road for safer movement for travellers

The Territory Government is committed to providing a safe and secure bus network. Providing safe public transportation is crucial for the well-being and security of passengers. When people have access to reliable and secure transportation options, they can commute safely, which leads to enhanced quality of life. A number of measures are in place to provide a safe and accessible public transport network.

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (DIPL) has a dedicated Transit Safety Unit with 18 staff and invests over \$2.8 million per year to ensure this team is well trained, has appropriate equipment, and their work hours cover the bus network seven days a week.

Transit Officers work closely with Police and Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (Larrakia Nation) in an effort to address antisocial behaviour from a holistic perspective, which includes weekly joint operations targeting hot spots on the network.

Budget 2023 includes additional funding to coordinate and manage antisocial behaviour on the bus network including security riding on buses and enhanced security at interchanges. Other measures to increase safety on the public bus network include:

- CCTV on all buses and at bus interchanges;
- CCTV at interchanges can be viewed in real time by Police and Transit Officers; and
- all Transit Officers wear body-worn cameras, which has assisted with deterring some antisocial behaviour and are a valuable source of information for complaints, criminal investigations and auditing purposes.

Providing a safe, efficient and reliable bus network service is a priority for this Government and we will continue to address these behaviours using a variety of mechanisms available.

3. Increase Police presence and patrols in residential areas, shops, and public areas to deter criminal activity

Budget 2023 invests \$1.1 billion in public order safety and a record \$721 million in social protection to deliver a range of initiatives to build safer, fairer and more resilient communities.

The Social Order Response Team (SORT) works to improve social order and safety outcomes for children, families, and businesses and, therefore, the wider community. The SORT works closely with the community to identify where improvements can be made, where service delivery gaps exist, and what additional resources are required to solve these complex social issues. Representatives from The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Larrakia Nation and Liquor Accord group are included in the SORT.

The response includes a comprehensive social order response plan that addresses issues such as antisocial behaviour, grog running, school attendance, community amenity, public drinking, illegal camping and domestic, family and sexual violence. We are also investing in tackling the root causes of crime, like poverty, poor housing and alcohol abuse.

The Public Order Response Unit (PORU) operates in Palmerston and the Northern Suburbs, and follows other private security patrols in Darwin's CBD and inner suburbs. This program seeks to improve community safety and liveability with a visible security presence.

The PORU works collaboratively with NT Police, Larrakia Nation, City of Palmerston Rangers, City of Darwin Rangers, Transit Security Officers and other frontline service providers to engage with local businesses and respond to issues.

The PORU is not a replacement for a police response, but instead is a complimentary service that seeks to build engagement and collaboration with the community while addressing anti-social behaviour issues.

4. Cover more areas under live surveillance to detect threats and prompt action where necessary

Closed circuit television (CCTV) systems continue to be an efficient and effective community safety tool to deter, detect and investigate antisocial and criminal behaviour. CCTV operators proactively identify and report incidents direct to the front line and provide relevant information to police in real time.

The CCTV unit currently has 1202 cameras connected across the NT, consisting of 892 police cameras and 310 cameras from City of Darwin and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

There are also 20 Mobile CCTV Trailers, each with two cameras, across Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. There are five CCTV Teams that monitor the cameras and respond to incidents 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

5. Provide support to victims of crime, including counselling and financial assistance

There are a range of services currently available to Victims of Crime including:

- **Free counselling to victims of violent crime**: under the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* (VOCA Act), the NTG funds CatholicCareNT to provide up to eight free clinical counselling sessions to people affected by violent crime - whether victims, their relatives or witnesses. Victims can self-refer for face-to-face, telephone or group counselling, and CatholicCareNT has a footprint in various locations across the Territory, including Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine, Wurrumiyanga, Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa) and Tennant Creek. More information available is available at <https://www.catholicarent.org.au/service-category/mental-health/>
- **Financial assistance to victims of violent crime**: provided under the VOCA Act, this includes financial assistance for mental health support services not covered by Medicare, such as private psychologists or psychiatrists. Financial assistance can also cover loss of earnings, loss of personal items, medical or dental costs, and immediate payments may be available to assist a victim's recovery, such as resecuring the home or relocation for domestic and family violence victims.
- **Funding to Victims of Crime NT**: Victims of Crime NT (VoCNT) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides support, information, referral and advocacy services to all victims of crime, including property crime. VoCNT services include a 24-hour support line, free home security assessments, and emergency resecure services following residential break-ins or vehicle damage. VoCNT also runs the BizSecure Program that can assist with resecuring small businesses following a break in. VoCNT has offices in Darwin and Alice Springs. In October 2022, Government announced an additional \$2 million for VoCNT to increase support for victims of crime, allowing VoCNT to enhance and expand their services to more Territorians including for vehicle and home resecuring.

- **Witness Assistance Service (WAS):** Run by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, WAS provides support to victims who may have to give evidence in court, by explaining the court process, liaising with police, prosecutors and interpreters, helping people to make victim impact statements, and physically accompanying victims throughout the whole court process. WAS has offices in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs.
- There are also targeted services for particular cohorts of victims, including through the Domestic Violence Legal Service and the Sexual Assault Referral Centre, which provides specialised medical treatment and free counselling for sexual assault victims.

6. Educate the community about the impact of crime and the importance of reporting suspicious behaviour

Territorians should always call 000 in an emergency and 131 444 to speak to Police about non-emergency matters.

Crime Stoppers Northern Territory runs initiatives that encourage people to report criminal or suspicious behaviour and provides advice on how to best do this. More information can be found here <https://crimestoppersnt.com.au/initiatives/>.

Neighbourhood Watch also provides a range of resources and information on community safety, and also provides a dedicated website on how to report crime. This can be seen here <https://www.nhwnt.org.au/reportingcrime>.

StudyNT also organises events such as 'navigating safety', which includes presentations from Neighbourhood Watch, and 'Coffee with a Cop', where international students are able to familiarise themselves, and become more comfortable, with NT Police officers.

7. Increase resources and funding for community-based programs that address the root causes of crime, such as poverty, substance abuse and mental health issues

We are working to make change in the short term and long term by addressing the root causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. Below lists a range of investments and programs that address disadvantage, insecure housing, mental health, and other factors that can lead to crime and antisocial behaviour.

Housing

Safe and secure housing is a critical element of a healthy and stable life. The Northern Territory Community Housing Growth Strategy 2022-32 (the Strategy) is transforming the way we deliver housing in the Northern Territory by providing targeted, sector-led services, contributing to community renewal and attracting non-government investment in social and affordable housing.

The NT Government plans to transfer up to 40 per cent of its urban public housing to the housing sector to support its growth, which will lead to improved tenant outcomes, most importantly, as well as increased neighbourhood amenity and asset management.

The first two buildings of John Stokes Square were completed in December 2022, and handed over to Venture Housing for long term asset and tenancy management, with the first tenants moving in from early January 2023. The third building will also be handed over to Venture Housing upon its completion.

John Stokes Square achieves a key milestone in the Strategy's pipeline, and provides 78 households with secure, fit-for-purpose social housing.

We are also investing heavily in housing in remote communities and homelands, with our \$1.1 billion Remote Housing Investment Package 'Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes,' which includes:

- \$500 million for new homes under the HomeBuild Scheme;
- \$200 million to increase living spaces in existing homes through the Room to Breathe Program;
- \$200 million to expand Government Employee Houses to locally recruited Northern Territory Government employees; and
- \$200 million for housing repairs and maintenance.

In addition, the Australian Government committed \$550 million through the National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory to improve Aboriginal housing in remote communities, along with remaining elements of former National Partnerships. The Australian Government has also provided \$100 million over two years to the Northern Territory Government to improve housing conditions for Aboriginal Territorians living on homelands.

Health and mental health

It is critical that people get the health care that they need, when they need it. This year's budget commits \$2 billion to health services across the **NT**, including for hospital upgrades, remote clinic upgrades, and \$15.5 million to continue assessment, withdrawal, and specialised alcohol treatment services to assist people with alcohol misuse issues and dependence.

The last few years have also seen a significant investment and progress in mental health and suicide prevention, including, but not limited to:

- over \$60 million in new specialised mental health infrastructure at Royal Darwin Hospital;
- over 160 programs worth \$1.2 million (so far) on suicide prevention grants;

- repealing and updating the *Mental Health and Related Service Act 1998* (currently underway); and
- In partnership with the Australian Government, investing \$11.5 million to establish and operate new adult and kids Head to Health services, which are expected to open in 2024.

Education and school attendance

We know that children in school are far less likely to commit crime or to engage in antisocial behaviour than those who are not at school. That's why, in the next financial year alone, we are investing \$1.37 billion in education across the Territory, including:

- \$557 million for government school resourcing;
- \$35.3 million to continue to improve Aboriginal student outcomes through the delivery of programs under the Indigenous Education Strategy; and
- \$4 million to introduce new and improved digital connectivity technologies for Territory schools, with a focus on remote and regional schools.

Supporting vulnerable Territorians

There are a number of other new initiatives and investments to support Territorians who need it the most, including:

- \$31 million additional support for out of home care, including for young people with high needs;
- \$14 million as part of the redevelopment of the old Shiers Street public housing complex;
- \$11.3 million for upgraded and new remote service delivery hubs to improve the coordination and delivery of government services in remote areas;
- \$10.5 million to construct a new, purpose-built youth hub facility at the former Casuarina fire station site and a new men's shed in Darwin, including remediation work at the site prior to constructing the new youth hub; and
- \$9.7 million to progress delivery of the Tennant Creek Visitor Park project as part of the Barkly Regional Deal to provide safe, secure and alcohol free accommodation for visitors to Tennant Creek from remote communities and outstations.

We are committed to supporting all Territorians to be healthy, to have a safe and comfortable home, school and work environment, and to be educated and employable.

We are absolutely committed to ensuring that all people have access to the necessary social support networks that are critical to preventing crime.

Sifat's unfortunate death has been heartbreaking for all Territorians. His memory will not be forgotten and our thoughts continue to be with his parents, family members and friends, both here and in Bangladesh.

Thank you again for taking the time to deliver this petition to me. I trust the information provided here reassures you somewhat that our government respects your time and contribution, takes your questions of community safety very seriously, and that we have the investments, programs and policies in place to make the long-term change that is needed.

Yours sincerely

NGAREE AH KIT

27/06/2023