



16 February 2026

Legislative Scrutiny Committee
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
Northern Territory Parliament

To the Legislative Scrutiny Committee of the Northern Territory Parliament,

RE: SENTENCING AMENDMENT (MURDER) BILL 2026

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is the peak body for the social and community service sector in the Northern Territory (NT). NTCOSS's membership is comprised of community managed, non-government, not-for-profit organisations that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy.

NTCOSS advocates for and with the domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) sector (the Sector) in the NT to improve safety, wellbeing, economic and social justice outcomes for impacted individuals and communities. The Sector includes Aboriginal Community Controlled DFSV services, Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Services, remote safe houses, women's shelters, DFSV specialist counselling services, women's legal services and specialist sexual violence services. NTCOSS facilitate a Territory-wide DFSV network, which includes over 30 NTCOSS member DFSV services. This network supports the coordination and advocacy within the NT DFSV sector.

NTCOSS acknowledge that we live and work on what always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures and country, and to Elders both past and present. We acknowledge the courage and dignity of those who stand up and say no to violence, and the DFSV knowledge and learning provided to us by Aboriginal people we work and live with in our communities. NTCOSS also recognise the diversity of the Northern Territory, where nearly one-third of Territorians come from multicultural and refugee backgrounds.¹ Cultural safety must therefore be understood as encompassing both Aboriginal and multicultural worldviews, histories, and experiences.

The following responds to the call for submissions regarding the *Sentencing Amendment (Murder) Bill 2026*, here after referred to as 'the Bill'.

The NT continues to experience the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia. On average, there are 115 incidents of domestic violence reported each day in the NT.² NTCOSS recognises that this violence disproportionately impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families, and communities.

¹ NTG Multicultural Strategy Consultation Paper (2025)

² <https://pfes.nt.gov.au/newsroom/2024/new-years-day-day-increased-risk-domestic-violence-northern-territory>

NTCOSS supports the NT Government's commitment to reducing DFSV-related harm. However, meaningful and sustained progress requires a strong, well-resourced primary prevention and early intervention.

While legislative reforms play an important role in ensuring accountability for people who use violence, it does not address the underlying drivers of DFSV. Extensive evidence demonstrates that preventing violence against women requires addressing the drivers of violence. The violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is closely connected to broader colonial violence and the intergenerational impacts of dispossession, including the forced removal of children, the disruption of cultural practices that previously helped prevent interpersonal violence, and the ongoing economic exclusion and disadvantage experienced across communities.³ Combined with the additional gender based-inequalities faced by women and girls throughout the NT and Australia, these factors significantly contribute to the prevalence of violence.⁴ Addressing these structural and systemic drivers must be a central priority if the Northern Territory is to meaningfully reduce and ultimately prevent violence against women.

The Bill represents a post-offence legislative response that does not contribute to primary prevention, or early intervention to reduce the risk of serious violence before it occurs. A strong and consistent body of evidence shows that increasing the severity of sentences for serious offences, including homicide, does not deter offending or reduce violence.⁵ For victim survivors-survivors and their families, reforms focused solely on punishment after harm has already occurred offer no protection, no earlier intervention, and no reduction in exposure to escalating risk.

In the context of DFSV, homicide is frequently the culmination of a prolonged pattern of coercion and abuse. Effective early intervention therefore relies on prompt identification of risk, system accountability, and timely intervention, not on judicial responses after a death has occurred. Evidence from public health and violence prevention frameworks further demonstrates that legislative reform, when not accompanied by investment in primary prevention, early intervention, and violence user-focused accountability mechanisms, fails to improve safety outcomes for women, children, and communities.⁶ -term community safety.

The changes proposed by the Bill may inadvertently contribute further to experiences of victimisation and disadvantage due to misidentification of women as perpetrators of violence, rather than victim survivors in often highly complex circumstances. Mandatory sentencing

³ Changing the picture- A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children, Our Watch

⁴ Change the story. A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (second edition), Our Watch

⁵ Tonry, M. (2008). *Learning from the limitations of deterrence research*. *Crime and Justice*, 37(1), 279–311.

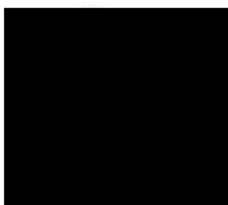
⁶ World Health Organization. (2010). *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence*.

could further increase the incarceration and traumatisation of victim survivors of DFSV in the NT.

NTCOSS supports a primary prevention approach as the foundation of any effective response to violence in the NT. Preventing harm before it occurs must be prioritised, post-offence measures, as it is the only approach supported by evidence to reduce violence, improve safety, and minimise lifelong impacts on victim-survivors, families, and communities. A primary prevention focus addresses the underlying drivers of violence and strengthens systems to identify and respond to risk before violence occurs. Without this focus, legislative and policy responses risk responding to harm only after it has occurred, rather than preventing future victimisation and loss of life.

Thank you for considering our submission. Please contact ceo@ntcoss.org.au for further information.

Yours sincerely,



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CEO NTCOSS