



22 May 2026

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

To the Legislative Scrutiny Committee of the Northern Territory Parliament,

**RE: Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters)
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, which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. This includes frontline domestic and family violence services, children and families' services, disability services, housing and homelessness services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Aboriginal Legal Services and Women's Legal Services. Members have head offices across all five regions of the NT and deliver services across an extensive remote footprint. Many of these organisations have made their own submissions regarding these amendments and several are co-signatories on this submission. NTCOSS acknowledges in particular the expertise of specialist child and family, and legal services and their submissions to this process.

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. NTCOSS also recognise the diversity of the Northern Territory, where nearly one-third of Territorians come from multicultural and refugee backgrounds. Cultural safety must therefore be understood as encompassing both Aboriginal and multicultural worldviews, histories, and experiences.¹

The following responds to the call for submissions regarding the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026 (the Bill).

NTCOSS recommends any child protection reform is done in consultation with Aboriginal organisations, community, social and non-government services, legal services, experts, frontline workers, and affected communities, families and children. NTCOSS and the undersigned propose that the Legislative Scrutiny Committee recommend the Legislative Assembly do not pass the Bill.

Central to the work of NTCOSS and its members is, in collaboration with government and communities, building and supporting communities where children and young people

¹ NTG Multicultural Strategy Consultation Paper (2025)

are safe and well. Investment in prevention and early interventions that support families and communities, ensuring basic needs are met, and access to quality support services is the best way to make sure children are safe and well, preventing child protection interventions.

Basic Needs

Addressing the underlying conditions that place families at risk is the most effective way of keeping children safe. Key drivers of child protection involvement are closely linked to poverty, housing insecurity, service shortages, intergenerational disadvantage, and systemic and racial discrimination

Meeting basic needs is foundational to strong family units and to the wellbeing and safety of children. The NT continues to experience some of the highest rates of disadvantage in Australia. Improving access to these essentials is one of the most effective ways the Government can support families to care safely for their children and reduce child protection involvement.

NTCOSS recommends prioritising support pathways outside a legislative response in the first instance, this should include:

- **Increased investment in safe, affordable and accessible housing.** Safe and secure housing provides the foundation for children’s safety and wellbeing. There is a significant shortfall of social and affordable housing in the NT, with waitlists for public housing up to 10 years. Without greater investment, many families in the Northern Territory will remain in insecure, unsafe or unsuitable housing
- **Ensure families can meet fundamental basic needs, including food security, reliable energy, shelter and transport.** Greater investment and targeted supports are needed to improve food security and energy affordability. Access to reliable and affordable power is essential to the well-being of Territorians. When power is unaffordable and unreliable, households may be unable to maintain a safe indoor temperature or safely store food and medication. When short term accommodation is unaffordable or unavailable households are impacted by visitors who are required to travel to urban centres for vital services. Appropriate short stay accommodation is required to reduce the impact of visitors and overcrowding on households.
- **Invest in place-based, culturally appropriate early years, children and families services for all Territorians.** Access to appropriate social and community services will help to set families up for success.
- **Increase investment in therapeutic, rehabilitation, counselling and community-led early intervention supports.** Families need timely access to

services that address underlying challenges and support safe caregiving before concerns escalate. Investing in early, community-based support can reduce crisis responses and help keep children safe.

- **Strengthen culturally safe, community-controlled and place-based responses that work alongside families before crisis points are reached.** These responses are often best placed to build trust, respond to local context and provide support in ways that are culturally safe and effective. Strengthening them will help families access support earlier and reduce the need for statutory intervention.
- **Long-term investment in reducing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV).** DFSV is a significant factor in child protection involvement in the NT. Investment in prevention activities which address the drivers of violence, as well as adequately supporting the response to DFSV, is crucial to reduce the rates of DFSV in the NT and the impact this has on children's safety.

Service System

The NGO and community-controlled sectors operate under significant pressure, with many services experiencing workforce shortages, underfunding and increasing demand. Grant funding has not kept pace with cost increases, and in 2023 almost half of non-for-profit social service providers operated at a loss.²

When services are not adequately funded, people in crisis often miss out on the early support they need. This results in higher demand on expensive acute and emergency systems, including child protection.

Investment into community services, focused on prevention and early intervention, will improve the sector's capacity to provide meaningful support to families.

Long-term impacts

Changes to child protection systems that increase children's and families' contact with the system and lead to longer periods of intervention, including extended time in out-of-home care and disconnection from family, community and culture, can cause significant harm, including attachment disruption, trauma, distrust of government systems and ongoing intergenerational impacts. These risks are particularly concerning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, who continue to experience the effects of colonisation and past government policies that disrupted parenting, family structures and cultural practices. NTCOSS recommends that any

² Gilchrist, Perks, Emery, Value of the Sector Report, 2025

reform to the child protection system is aligned to best practice principles, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles, and includes investment in increased prevention and early intervention.

In summary, NTCOSS strongly supports the importance of child safety and recognises the need for effective child protection systems. However, NTCOSS advocates for any reform to focus on prevention and early intervention to support families and prevent child protection interventions.

Thank you for considering our submission. Please contact [REDACTED] for further information.



54 reasons



