



SENATOR JACINTA NAMPIJINPA PRICE

SENATOR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

10 February 2026

Secretary
Legislative Scrutiny Committee
GPO Box 3721, DARWIN NT 0801
by email to LSC@nt.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

RE: Sentencing Amendment (Murder) Bill 2026

Domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory is a serious and ongoing threat to the safety of women, children and men. It is happening in homes that should be safe.

The Northern Territory continues to experience the highest domestic¹ and family violence rates in Australia.² Available reporting indicates that approximately 100 women have been killed by intimate partners in the Northern Territory over the past 25 years, based on police and coronial reporting.^{3 4}

Recent data also reinforces the ongoing risk. In 2024, seven⁵ of nine homicide victims in the Northern Territory were linked to family and domestic violence,⁶ demonstrating the continued connection between serious violence and domestic and family violence offending.

Coronial and inquiry findings have identified domestic and family violence homicide rates in the Northern Territory at multiples of the national average,⁷ reinforcing the severity and persistence of the problem.⁸

Exposure to domestic violence, abuse, neglect and chronic disengagement from education contributes to long-term cycles of trauma, offending and incarceration. If the objective is to protect the next generation, these drivers must be addressed directly, while maintaining a clear and consistent standard that violence is never acceptable.

Coronial findings into multiple domestic violence deaths in the Northern Territory reinforce what families, victims and frontline workers have consistently reported.⁹ That is that violence escalates when systems do not intervene early, consistently and effectively.

¹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-victims/2023>

² <https://www.dfsv.gov.au/northern-territory-visit-summary-report>

³ <https://agd.nt.gov.au/media/docs/inquest-finding-publications/2024/74c7ad06daceae11bd2c0534cdc274fe6e61b06e.pdf> at [7]

⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-02-03/nt-government-increases-non-parole-dv-murder-life-sentence-jail/106298466>

⁵ <https://www.dfsv.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/DFSVC%20media%20release%20-%20Recent%20DFV%20deaths%20in%20NT.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-victims/latest-release>

⁷ <https://agd.nt.gov.au/media/docs/inquest-finding-publications/2024/74c7ad06daceae11bd2c0534cdc274fe6e61b06e.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.equalityinstitute.org/app/uploads/2025/09/Evidence-Snapshot-What-We-Know-About-Domestic-Family-and-Sexual-Violence-in-the-Northern-Territory-and-What-We-Dont.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-12/domestic-violence-response-nt-co-responder-model/105862072>

Whether the Assembly Should Pass the Bill

The Bill amends section 53A of the Sentencing Act 1995 to require courts to set a mandatory minimum non-parole period of 25 years' imprisonment for the murder of a current or former intimate partner, except in exceptional circumstances, while maintaining life imprisonment as the maximum penalty.

The amendment is intended to reflect that sentencing courts have recognised that domestic and family violence homicide causes profound and enduring harm not only to the direct victim, but also to the victim's family and the broader community.¹⁰

The Sentencing Act establishes mandatory life imprisonment for murder and requires courts, in the ordinary course, to fix a standard non-parole period, subject only to limited statutory exceptions. This framework reflects the legislature's assessment of the seriousness of the offence.¹¹ Communities are entitled to confidence that the law supports victims and holds offenders properly accountable.

Consistency in sentencing is achieved through the consistent application of legal principles, ensuring that like cases are treated alike while allowing for differences based on individual circumstances.¹²

Parliament may prescribe sentencing ranges and minimum non-parole periods, while courts retain responsibility for applying those statutory parameters to the facts of individual cases.¹³

Sentencing certainty in cases of intimate partner murder sends a clear and necessary message about community standards and the seriousness with which these offences are treated.

In the context of the Northern Territory's sustained and disproportionate domestic and family violence burden, establishing a clear and consistent sentencing baseline for the most serious offences can form a necessary and proportionate safeguard of protecting victims and reinforcing community safety expectations.

Whether the Assembly Should Amend the Bill

While the Bill itself is justified, sentencing reform must operate alongside broader system reform.

No legislative amendments are suggested. However, stronger penalties alone will not prevent loss of life if victims are not visible to the system, if evidence cannot be captured early, or if high-risk offenders move through the justice system without victims being informed or protected.

If victim-centred justice is to be meaningful, the burden of protection must rest with the system, not with victims who are already living in fear.

To maximise effectiveness in practice, implementation should include:

- Consistent sentencing guidance for courts and practitioners;
- Improved early evidence capture and risk documentation in domestic violence matters;
- Strengthened victim notification systems across police, courts and corrections; and
- Long-term offender risk management and domestic violence-specific parole assessment.

To support effective implementation, existing public reporting through court sentencing remarks and annual reporting processes should be complemented by system-wide reporting on victim notification

¹⁰ R v Dhamarrandji https://supremecourt.nt.gov.au/resources/documents/sentencing-remarks/2024/april/Dhamarrandji_02042024_22038500_sen_net.pdf

¹¹ The King v John [2025] https://supremecourt.nt.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1570401/John_07112025_22321319_sen_net-003.pdf

¹² Hili v The Queen; Jones v The Queen [2010] <https://www.hcourt.gov.au/cases-and-judgments/judgments/judgments-1998-current/hili-v-queen>

¹³ The King v Wilson [2024] NTCCA 14 <https://supremecourt.nt.gov.au/resources/documents/decisions/nt-court-of-appeals/2024/NTCCA-14-The-King-v-Wilson-18-Dec.pdf>

performance and high-risk offender management indicators to ensure the reform delivers measurable community safety outcomes.

Without these system supports, stronger penalties alone will not achieve their intended community safety outcomes.

Consideration of Alternative Views

It is also important to acknowledge concerns raised by some legal and policy experts regarding mandatory minimum sentencing. Critics argue that mandatory minimums can reduce judicial discretion, potentially limiting the court's ability to fully consider individual circumstances of offending and prospects for rehabilitation. There are also broader concerns that mandatory sentencing can shift sentencing authority away from courts and may have limited impact on deterrence if it is not supported by early intervention and victim protection measures.

Concerns about mandatory minimum sentencing should be considered carefully. However, in the context of intimate partner murder, where the harm is irreversible, strong and certain sentencing baselines are an important part of protecting victims and reinforcing accountability.

Whether the Bill has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals

In considering whether the Bill appropriately limits individual rights, it is relevant to apply a structured proportionality analysis. The objective of the amendment is legitimate and pressing, namely the protection of life and the prevention of serious domestic and family violence. The measure is rationally connected to that objective by establishing a clear sentencing baseline that reflects the extreme seriousness of intimate partner murder.

The limitation is proportionate, as the offence addressed involves intentional loss of life and the Bill preserves judicial oversight through the exceptional circumstances provision. Safeguards remain through existing appeal rights and judicial processes. In this context, the measure represents a targeted and proportionate response to an identified and ongoing risk to community safety.

The amendment is also consistent with separation of powers principles, with Parliament setting sentencing parameters while courts retain responsibility for applying the law to individual cases, including through the exceptional circumstances safeguard.

Whether the Bill has sufficient regard to the institution of Parliament

Evidence-based lawmaking strengthens public trust.

Parliament has a responsibility to act where evidence shows systems are failing to protect the most vulnerable. Legislation should be clear in intent and transparent in purpose.

Where serious and preventable loss of life continues to occur, it is appropriate for Parliament to consider whether existing legislative settings remain fit for purpose.

Conclusion

The central objective of the Bill is clear: the protection of life and the reduction of serious domestic and family violence.

Intimate partner homicide represents one of the most serious failures of community and institutional protection. Where evidence demonstrates sustained and disproportionate harm, it is appropriate for Parliament to consider whether existing legislative settings remain sufficient to protect those at greatest risk.

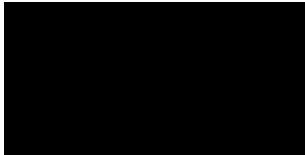
The proposed amendment establishes a clear sentencing baseline for the most serious form of violent offending, while preserving judicial oversight through the exceptional circumstances safeguard and existing appeal mechanisms. In this context, the amendment represents a targeted and proportionate legislative response.

It is also important to recognise that sentencing reform alone cannot prevent loss of life. Stronger sentencing must operate alongside effective early intervention, victim protection, evidence capture, and long-term offender risk management. The effectiveness of the reform will depend on its implementation within a broader system response focused on prevention and victim safety.

The Northern Territory continues to face unique and ongoing challenges in relation to domestic and family violence. Legislative settings should reflect that reality, while maintaining public confidence that the justice system will respond decisively and consistently to the most serious forms of offending.

In these circumstances, the Bill represents a reasonable and proportionate exercise of Parliament's legislative responsibility to protect life, reinforce accountability, and support community safety.

Yours sincerely,



Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price
Senator for the Northern Territory