

22/05/2026

To: Secretary, Legislative Scrutiny Committee

Re: Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026

Anglicare NT and its predecessor organisations (Anglicare Top End and Anglicare Central Australia) have been operating for over 70 years. Anglicare NT is an Australian Charities and Not For-Profits Commission registered and quality accredited community services organisation solely operating in the Northern Territory. We provide a range of responsive services primarily across Greater Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and East Arnhem regions. Our programs include well established services in the areas of child youth and family support, youth mental health (headspace programs), homelessness services, aged and disability and financial wellbeing. Our strengths based, integrated and timely approaches work with people across the life span in times of need and adversity.

As a social service working with families and children affected by the current child protection system we do not support any change to the current legislation without first completing an independent inquiry of the system. Anglicare NT also believes that any reform to child protection must also be met with strengthened investment in services and practical strategies which support Territory families.

From our work with children, young people and families across the Territory, including in Aboriginal communities, we know that many families are contending with severe housing instability, overcrowding and cost-of-living pressures while also facing long waits for stable accommodation, alcohol and other drug treatment, counselling and other therapeutic supports. Families cannot meet escalating expectations when the services needed to do so are unavailable, unaffordable or geographically out of reach.

As a family support service for the purposes of the proposed in the *Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bil (NT) 2026* we would offer comments in relation to the proposed changes.

The Explanatory Statement presents the Bill as an early intervention and support-focused reform, yet the drafting establishes a far more coercive framework through family responsibility agreements, family responsibility orders, expanded intervention triggers and a stronger emphasis on permanency. In our view, the explanatory material does not adequately explain how these powers will operate where the underlying issues are housing insecurity, poverty, disability, family violence, school disengagement, remoteness or the absence of services. Nor does it provide sufficient assurance that families will have access to legal advice, culturally safe decision-making and practical support before

consequences attach. These gaps should be addressed to ensure the legislation strengthens families rather than widening the reach through punitive intervention.

The Bill lowers the threshold for government intervention by introducing broad and subjective concepts such as “wellbeing concerns”, “events of concern”, anti-social behaviour and school attendance as triggers for child protection involvement. These are not neutral indicators. In the Northern Territory context, they are often closely connected to poverty, overcrowding, service exclusion and broader social disadvantage rather than deliberate parental neglect or an absence of care.

While enshrining proactive efforts in legislation is a welcome step, it is unlikely to deliver meaningful change unless the child protection system is properly resourced, independently scrutinised, and structurally capable of supporting reunification in practice. At present, the system does not appear designed or equipped to enable child protection workers to provide the intensive, timely and sustained support needed to address the reasons for removal and pursue reunification within the first six months. Without an independent inquiry into the operation of the system and the reforms required to make it functional, there is little confidence that this obligation can be met in any consistent or effective way. The Bill also fails to impose any real consequence where DCF does not make proper proactive efforts. Instead, it leaves DCF to define the content of those efforts, creating a real risk that they will be minimal, inconsistent, or not directed towards reunification from the outset. In that context, the inclusion of proactive efforts risks being more symbolic than substantive. At a minimum, proactive efforts should be active, documented, culturally safe, trauma informed and tailored to the family's circumstances. The legislation should also make clear that families are not to be prejudiced where reunification is delayed by structural barriers such as housing shortages, long service waitlists, lack of transport, or the absence of locally available supports.

Our workers regularly support families who deeply love their children but are navigating systems that are difficult to access, inconsistent or unavailable. From an advocacy perspective, we are concerned that the Bill risks shifting the child protection system further away from support and toward compliance, surveillance and escalation. Families experiencing poverty, overcrowding, family violence, disability, remoteness and service exclusion should not be treated as presenting the same kind of risk as deliberate harm or abandonment. Without clearer statutory safeguards, the broad language in the Bill may result in structural disadvantage being misread as parental failure.

While we clearly understand the importance of safeguarding the wellbeing of children, Anglicare NT submits that child safety is best advanced through legislation that is precise, proportionate and grounded in the realities facing Territory families. If the Government wishes to proceed with reform, the Bill should be strengthened to require active, documented, culturally safe and trauma informed efforts before coercive intervention occurs; to ensure that parents are only held to obligations that are reasonable and

achievable in light of available supports; and to make clear that permanency, stability and wellbeing must not be pursued in ways that unnecessarily separate children from family, kin, culture, language, Country and community.

In practice, the implementation of this Bill is likely to result in more children entering long-term care earlier and remaining separated from family, culture and community for longer. From our work, we know that disconnection from family, country, language and culture can have lasting effects on identity, wellbeing and belonging, particularly where removal occurs in response to unmet need rather than immediate safety concerns.

Anglicare NT supports the importance of child safety and recognises the need for effective child protection systems. However, we do not believe this Bill addresses the underlying causes driving child protection involvement in the Northern Territory and that the current system is adequately resourced to do so.

We are calling on the Northern Territory Government to undertake genuine consultation with Aboriginal organisations, community-controlled services, legal services, frontline workers and affected communities to develop trauma informed, evidence based reforms that keep children safe by strengthening families and communities, not by expanding punitive intervention.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Kelly

CEO - Anglicare NT