

22 May 2026

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

About Wangatunga Strong Women

The Wangatunga Strong Women are a group of Tiwi women working to empower community, particularly young women and families, through culture, education, and art. The women work in partnership with the Australian Red Cross through a shared centre in Wurrumiyanga, Tiwi Islands. Four members are employed as Family Support Workers under the DCF FSS grant, managed by Red Cross, and work closely with families and children experiencing challenges and hardship. This support includes providing support and connection to other services for challenges such as family and parenting strengthening, housing, poverty, domestic and family violence, disability, mental health challenges, community disconnection, and substance abuse.

Opening Position / Main Concern

Wangatunga Strong Women team are deeply concerned about the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026.

While we support the importance of keeping children safe, we are concerned that the Bill significantly expands the Northern Territory Government's powers to intervene in family life without first ensuring families can access the housing, therapeutic support, rehabilitation, counselling and early intervention services needed to safely care for children.

We are concerned that the Bill lowers the level of concern needed before the Government can intervene in family life by introducing broad concepts such as "wellbeing concerns", "events of concern", anti-social behaviour and school attendance as triggers for child protection involvement.

From our work with children and families, we know that many of the issues driving child protection involvement are closely connected to poverty, housing stress, service shortages and intergenerational disadvantage rather than a lack of care or love for children.

We are concerned that the Bill risks increasing surveillance and coercive intervention into the lives of families already struggling under significant social and economic pressure.

The Wangatunga Strong Women team have provided the following feedback in relation to the proposed changes that they would like the government to listen to:

- If these changes go through it will make a lot of people worry. They will not be happy (will result in depression / worsen mental health issues)
- There should be more programs for families and parents – There should be much more of a focus on education as well as preventative measures. Parents need to be

taught about growing up kids healthy and strong, and the impact that fighting and drinking can have on young children. Children also need programs to learn how to keep themselves and each other safe.

- There are lots of kids copying their parents. We need help to break the cycle to stop intergenerational trauma. Taking kids away from Tiwi will only make things worse.
- DCF used to bring kids from Darwin over to the island so that the group could teach the kids about their Tiwi culture. This hasn't happened since early 2025. (Meaning DCF already may not be meeting their obligations to support the children's rights to cultural connection)
- DCF need to be better at telling the family about what is going on and educating the family about the welfare process.
- We are upset that the CLP government have not come here to the island to talk with community about the changes.
- There are lots of good things happening on the island – lots of kids have good attendance at school, we do culture classes at the school every Thursday (singing, dancing, story telling), lots of kids do camping and fishing – this connection helps kids feel safe and let go of any worries they have, Tiwi language is also very strong here.

Short-Term Impacts on Children and Families

This Bill is likely to have immediate impacts on the children and families we work with on the island.

Families we work with are already experiencing significant housing instability, overcrowding and cost of living pressures. For example one family we work with have been on a wait list for housing for **11 years**, and have been raising their children in an overcrowded environment for the entirety of this time. Other experiencing or recovering from trauma have no access to timely, regular psychologist support beyond telehealth options, which is not accessible or appropriate for many of our clients. We are concerned the Bill creates obligations families cannot realistically meet within the proposed timeframes.

We are also concerned that increased coercive intervention may discourage families from seeking support early due to fears that engagement with services could escalate into child protection involvement. We often see families discouraged to engage in essential services due to fears of child protection involvement, and request attendance from our support workers when engaging with these services. We worry this will be worsened by these reforms. We also believe DCF also need to improve on explaining processes and what is happening to families they are engaging with.

Long-Term Impacts on Children, Families and Communities

We are concerned the long-term impacts of this Bill may extend far beyond immediate child protection intervention. We are concerned that the Bill's increased focus on permanency and strict timeframes will result in more children entering long-term care earlier and remaining separated from family, culture and community for longer periods.

From our work, we know that children experiencing disconnection from family, country, language and culture often experience long-term trauma and poorer wellbeing outcomes. We are particularly concerned about the impact on Aboriginal children and families if kinship and cultural placement options are not adequately supported and prioritised.

We would like to see more resources and effort from DCF into connecting removed children with their culture by supporting them to come back to their country and community for visits, we have witnessed this decrease significantly in recent years.

Missed Opportunity to Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention

This Bill represents a missed opportunity to invest in prevention, healing and early intervention.

We feel that the CLP should have come to the Tiwi Islands and talked to community prior to proposing these changes. There are lots of good things happening on the islands, with children improving school attendance, attending weekly culture classes, and connecting with country to help feel safe and let go of worries.

Rather than these changes we believe there should be more programs for families and parents, with more focus on education and preventative measures. Parents need to be taught about raising kids healthy and strong, and the impact that fighting and drinking can have on young children, while children need programs to learn about how to keep themselves and each other safe. We see in our work many children copying their parents' behaviour and we need to help break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

Impact on the Clients and Communities We Work With

The proposed reforms will have real impacts on the people and communities our organisation works alongside every day.

We support families who are trying to keep children safe while living in overcrowded housing, facing poverty, recovering from trauma, experiencing violence, and waiting for specialist services. Parents we work with deeply love their children but are navigating systems that are difficult to access, inconsistent or unavailable. We are concerned that

families experiencing poverty and disadvantage may increasingly be treated as risks to be managed rather than families needing support.

We are concerned that if these changes go through, they will make a lot of people worry, which will result in depression and worsened mental health issues. We are concerned for the impact this would have on parents, through failing to apply a strengths-based approach, and on children, through placing them at higher risk of being removed from their support systems, kinship network, and country.

Closing Position

Wangatunga Strong Women 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.

Instead, we are concerned the Bill:

- lowers the threshold for intervention into families;
- expands coercive powers;
- increases pathways into long-term care;
- fails to adequately address poverty, housing instability and service shortages;
- risks causing further harm to vulnerable children, families and communities.

We are calling on the Northern Territory Government to scrap the Bill and undertake genuine consultation with Aboriginal organisations, community services, legal services, frontline workers and affected communities to develop evidence-based reforms that keep children safe by strengthening families and communities rather than expanding punitive intervention.