



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

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

Early Childhood Australia

May 2026

About us:

Our Vision: Every young child is thriving and learning

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been a voice for young children since 1938. We are the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood field. ECA advocates to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children aged birth to eight years. Our role in achieving our vision is to be an effective advocate for young children and a champion for quality outcomes in early childhood education and care.

Early Childhood Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

Response to the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) 2026

Every child has the right to be safe, nurtured and supported to thrive. We recognise the Northern Territory Government's intention to place child safety at the centre of decision-making through the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026.

However, ECA urges the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Scrutiny Committee to ensure that the reforms are evidence-informed, culturally safe, trauma-informed and developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

Evidence and research undertaken into early childhood consistently demonstrates that the best outcomes for children occur when early and considered investment is made in children's lives - through access to high quality early childhood education, early intervention, prevention, family support, culturally responsive services and community-led interventions. Child protection responses alone cannot address underlying drivers of child harm, including poverty, overcrowded housing, family violence, intergenerational trauma, inadequate access to health care, and lack of early childhood supports.

ECA is concerned and cautions that any amendments that weaken or replace the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, risk undermining children's cultural identity, connection to kin, community and Country. Research and practice consistently show that maintaining these connections is critical to children's long-term social, emotional and developmental wellbeing. While child safety must always be paramount, cultural connection should not be framed as competing with safety; both are essential components of children's best interests.

We note the concerns raised by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT, SNAICC, NAAFLS, NAAJA, CAWLS and other child and family advocates that the proposed reforms may increase the removal of Aboriginal children from family and community without sufficient investment in culturally safe prevention and support services.

ECA strongly supports;

- Aboriginal community-controlled organisations leading service design and delivery
- Continued, coordinated and equitable investment in accessible, high-quality early childhood education and care
- Culturally safe parenting and family support programs
- Workforce development for early childhood professionals, family support workers and child protection practitioners
- Stronger cross-sector collaboration between education, health, housing and child protection systems, and appropriate resourcing of this important work
- Increased access to early intervention and family support services

We also emphasise the importance of stability and permanency for children in care. However, permanency planning must occur alongside genuine efforts toward family preservation and reunification wherever safe and possible. Decisions affecting children and families must be guided by independent oversight, procedural fairness and the voices of children themselves. The mandating of long-term orders, that put a two-year time limit on the opportunity for family reunification is too rigid and does not take into account individual family circumstances. Opportunities exist to consider reunification supports within a responsive universal system of early childhood education and care that privilege the rights, safety and best interest of children.

The Northern Territory faces unique challenges, including geographic remoteness, workforce shortages and deep pockets of disadvantage. Legislative reform alone will not resolve these systemic issues. Sustainable change requires coordinated, long-term investment in prevention, early childhood services and community-led solutions.

ECA recommends that the Committee:

- Retain strong protections for Aboriginal children's cultural identity and connection to family, kin and community;
- Strengthen requirements for genuine consultation with Aboriginal communities and organisations;
- Prioritise investment in early intervention and family support services;
- Ensure adequate resourcing for culturally safe early childhood education and care services across the NT; and
- Establish ongoing independent monitoring and evaluation of the reforms and their impact on children and families.

Every child matters. Achieving lasting improvements in child safety and safeguarding requires approaches that are evidence-based, culturally responsive and grounded in the rights and wellbeing of children, families and communities.

Early Childhood Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to policy and reform discussions, alongside other key stakeholders and organisations that support the safety, wellbeing and development of all children in the Northern Territory.

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