

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Guyula to the Minister for Territory Families:

Youth Justice

1. On 31 March I lodged Written Question 331. Please provide answers to the following questions that you advised should be raised at Estimates:

- a) For 2020, 2021 and 2022, how many children aged 10, 11, 12, and 13 have been held in detention and for how many days?
- b) By age group, please provide the percentage of these children who were being held on remand.

ANSWER

Table 1 below shows the number of children aged 10, 11, 12 and 13 years that were held in detention by financial year. All of the young people aged 10, 11, 12 and 13 years were held on remand.

Table 1: Number of young people aged 10-13 years by financial year

| Age at Reception | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 YTD to 31 March 2022 |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| | # Young people | # Young people | # Young people |
| Total number of young people | 18 | 23 | 34 |
| Median time in detention | 7 days | 10 days | 10 days |

- c) During the last 24 months, for each month, please identify the communities that detainees have come from and the number of detainees from those communities.

ANSWER

Due to the low number of detainees at a community level, the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (the Department) is unable to release figures without the possibility of identification. Table 2 below shows the number of detainees at a regional level by financial year.

Table 2: Number of detainees by region

| Region | 2020-21 | 2021-22 YTD to 31 March 2022 |
|--|------------|------------------------------|
| Alice Springs | 52 | 72 |
| Barkly | 11 | 10 |
| East Arnhem | 10 | 4 |
| Greater Darwin | 58 | 85 |
| Katherine | 22 | 32 |
| Top End | 19 | 18 |
| Unknown/Interstate | 9 | 17 |
| Total unique young people during year¹ | 176 | 225 |

d) During the past 24 months, please identify for each month the number of young people held in remand and the average length of time young people were held in remand?

ANSWER

Table 3: Number of young people in remand by month

| Month | 2020-21 | 2021-22 YTD to 31 March 2022 |
|--|------------|------------------------------|
| July | 31 | 67 |
| August | 20 | 66 |
| September | 32 | 85 |
| October | 42 | 86 |
| November | 39 | 97 |
| December | 44 | 80 |
| January | 46 | 75 |
| February | 57 | 79 |
| March | 55 | 87 |
| April | 61 | N/A |
| May | 66 | N/A |
| June | 68 | N/A |
| Total unique young people during year² | 173 | 222 |

The average length of time for a young person to be held in remand in the nine months to March 2022 was 21 days.

e) During the past 24 months, please provide the number of detainees that were held in remand and then continued to be detained according to sentencing.

ANSWER

Due to the nature of the ICT systems in which this information is held, it is difficult to extract this information. It is too administratively onerous/time-consuming to do so.

¹ Detainees with multiple receptions may present with different addresses during the year.

² A young person may be in remand over multiple months.

- 2. Over the past 14 months, there has been an enormous increase in the number of children at Don Dale. I understand that currently due to staff shortages there are extended periods of self-isolation.**

Over the last 2 months, please provide a day by day breakdown of how many hours that detainees have spent in self isolation each day. If there is a variation between detainees please provide the hours for those held the longest in self-isolation.

ANSWER

Youth Detention Centres in the Northern Territory do not practice any form of self-isolation or solitary confinement.

Rotational lockdowns between blocks do occur where a higher number of external escorts for court or unscheduled medical appearances, coupled with high remand numbers necessitate.

The periods of lockdown may vary and rotate between accommodation blocks. They are kept to a minimum. Where this has occurred, staff are permanently positioned on the block to ensure social and emotional wellbeing checks are conducted, as well as provision of meals, snacks, education packs, activities etcetera.

Youth Justice Determination 5.1 provides guidelines for supported separation of a young person under the *Youth Justice Act 2005*. Over the June and July 2022 reporting period, there have been a total of 26 separations within the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre (DDYDC). All notifications are reported to the Chief Executive Officer, and the Children's Commissioner of the Northern Territory. The reasons for separation include: young person's reasonable request; young person who was suffering from an infectious disease; and when reasonably necessary for the young person's protection, protection of another person or property.

During separation periods, each young person's physical and mental health is monitored, and the young person is meaningfully engaged throughout.

The Department continues to recruit youth justice officers to the DDYDC and the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre to limit the need for rotational lockdowns.

- 3. Tasmania has announced that it will raise the age for detention to 14 years old.**

a) Will the Northern Territory do the same?

b) Or what will the Northern Territory do to address the problem of locking up children who then become continual offenders?

ANSWER

The Northern Territory's Attorney-General is responsible for the Legislative Amendment Process in raising the age and therefore this question should be re-directed to his office.

- 4. For the 2022/23 budget, please provide a comparison of funding that is going into Detention centres against funding that is going into grass roots community-led initiatives for supporting young offenders?**

ANSWER

Young people are engaged in programs which respond to their offending behaviours and therapeutic needs. Whether external to or within youth detention centres, programs are selected to ensure that trauma informed, culturally appropriate restorative practice. This includes a range of providers from Grassroots Territory Enterprises through to Specialist Clinicians.

The 2022-23 budget is:

- Youth Justice Community Support and Diversion Programs - \$39.3 million; and
- Youth Justice Detention Operations and Programs - \$37.4 million.