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To: [Legislative Scrutiny Committee](#)
Subject: Child Removal Laws Submission
Date: Tuesday, 19 May 2026 8:12:41 PM

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To the scrutiny committee.

I am writing from a place of deep concern as a long time Territorian who was born overseas.

I have lived in central Australia for most of my adult life and have recently made Darwin my home. I have lived through the NTER years and felt the pain of my friends and new family as they described laws and government policy that removed jobs and responsibilities from adults and removed children from their families in a way that was looking like a continuation of the Stolen Generations.

It seemed like something was being done to avoid that- there was a Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles were agreed on and implemented. To an extent, it hasn't been enforced to the degree it was hoped nor even to the Governments own targets but at least it was in the legislation and there was some hope.

Under the proposed changes to the legislation are Child Removal Laws children will be criminalised for normal child responses to growing up. Who hasn't had periods in their life when they have had tantrums or behaviour issues. Sometimes these are extended periods such as when a family member, or sibling, or parent is sick and the child hasn't learned to regulate or express themselves yet and the fear comes out in 'anti-social' ways. Or when there is a relationship breakdown in the family. Or when there are health issues or undiagnosed disabilities and the services haven't been accessed yet or even available. Or there is a period of financial hardship or housing insecurity.

I know one family who waited for 12 years on the public housing waitlist but I hear the average is 4-6 years. All these could result in school non-attendance, anti-social behaviour and police contact. Under these changes, this leads to the pathway to out of home care, away from family and, crucially in these amendments, away from culture, with compressed timeframes for reunification and increased priority on permanence at any cost.

Where is the increased investment in the services to mitigate the threats to these families safety and autonomy?

Where is the healthcare, the mental health care, the disability supports, the early assessments, the public housing, the childcare to support employment, the increases to social security to counteract the ever rising costs of living and its inevitable impact on quality of life?

I watch with horror as the NT government are using our taxpayer money to propose more children in care at an average cost of more than hundred thousand dollars per child per year. Yet the recent budget did not see investment in additional community services. Where is the money for these child removals going to come from and what will be the long-term cost to communities.

I see every relevant Community and Aboriginal Organisation in the Northern Territory calling on the NT government to stop this amendment. These are the experts in the field and they have not been consulted or heard. The government is under pressure from organisations across the state and at every stage of interaction with children and families to not proceed with this bill. I trust professionals over politicians and they are all shouting for evidenced-based care and services over punitive state interference and criminalisation of families in crisis.

I call for public hearings statewide so that people get a chance to be heard as to the impacts of this policy.

Sincerely and with concern,
Roisin Prunty