

Secretary  
Legislative Scrutiny Committee  
Northern Territory Parliament  
[LA.Committees@nt.gov.au](mailto:LA.Committees@nt.gov.au)

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

## Background

Women's Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA) has been operating across the Central Australian region since 1978. WoSSCA operates under the vision that *all women and children live safely, with respect and dignity, free from violence in their chosen communities*. WoSSCA works to *prevent and respond to gendered violence in Central Australia*. We are committed to driving systemic change through strong advocacy and collaborative partnerships, working with the communities we serve.

WoSSCA provides the following services:

- A 30-bed crisis accommodation service for women and children experiencing domestic and family and sexual violence (DFSV); with access to specialist workers, including Case and Senior Case Workers; Central Intake workers; a Child Advocate; and an Aboriginal Cultural Advisor
- Proactive outreach including risk assessment, safety planning and case management to women and children experiencing DFSV in Alice Springs, and the remote communities of Papunya, Yuendumu, Yuelamu, Ntaria, Ti Tree, Mt Liebig and Atitjere
- Women's partner contact and safety work alongside the Tangentyere Men's Behaviour Change Program
- Coordinated, collaborative and timely DFV support to victim survivors through the Co-responder Program (in partnership with NTPOL, DCF and Tangentyere)
- Victim survivor support and advocacy at the Alice Springs Local Court and Alice Springs DFV Specialist Court

In addition to the above services, WoSSCA's Community Development and Training (CDT) engages [REDACTED] primary prevention initiatives, training and resources across the following

- Providing foundational education and workshops, as well as customised workshops for community and Government organisations across Central Australia
- Raising community awareness of DFSV through events; programs and campaigns (including 16 Days of Activism, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, DFSV Remembrance Day, International Women's Day)
- Secretariat and Chair support to the Central Australian Family Violence and Sexual Assault Network (CAFVSAN)
- Partners with key stakeholders to proactively respond to the development and training needs of different sectors across the NT e.g. WoSSCA was an integral consortium member for the development, implementation, and delivery of the Prevent, Assist, Respond training (PART) for frontline NT Police and Health
- Focus on Primary Prevention and Early Intervention e.g. [U Right Sis](#) - a community led, workshop-based response to preventing technology facilitated abuse and staying safe online

### **Considerations on the Care and Protection Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026**

At the core of WoSSCA's work is centering and honouring the lives of women and children who have experienced DFSV, their stories and their lived expertise – and as such, we hold firm the position that effective changes in the best interest of children and families across the Northern Territory cannot be done impetuously, nor can they be achieved in the absence of evidence, or without deep consideration of the voices of whom these legislations directly affect.

In consideration of this – we frame our feedback to the Care and Protection Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026 from this space – and we ask that you also collectively remember the gracious request of the mother of Kumanjayi Little Baby, who asked that the short life of her daughter not be used by politicians for reasons that do not honour and respect her.

WoSSCA rejects the proposed Care and Protection Legislation amendments in full, and provides the following feedback and recommendations across key focus areas:

#### **Focus on strengthening existing systems and frameworks – rather than weakening safeguards and principals of holistic safety**

Despite recent rhetoric, the current legislation already allows for consideration of the best interests of the child, while maintaining safety as paramount. These changes move best interest factor of culture and family connection to a consideration that 'may be relevant'. The proposed amendments will

undermine Aboriginal community involvement and decision making; prioritisation of kinship  
[REDACTED] cultural connections of Aboriginal children living in out of home care.

[REDACTED] these arrangements fail to recognise that the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP) is designed to safeguard against cultural connections being lost and maintain Aboriginal children with those who care for them best: their family, their community, with other Aboriginal carers – not in group homes (residential care) or foster families with no connection to culture and no desire to establish or maintain this connection.

The ACPP has never prevented the Department of Children and Families (DCF) from acting to protect a child at genuine risk. The ACPP has always meant actively seeking safe options, while also keeping children connected to culture and identity. Diminishing this Principle to being *optional*, greatly denies what evidence tells us: that placing a vulnerable child into care without ongoing connection to family and culture leads to poorer overall outcomes across youth justice (and subsequent adult justice system), substance abuse, poorer education; and greater risk of experiences of violence – both as a victim survivor and a person using violence<sup>1</sup>. WoSSCA strongly advocates for the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle to remain as is and holds the fundamental belief that every child has a right to know who they are.

Despite national calls for the reduction of reliance in purchased home based care and residential models, out of home care for children accounts for one of the largest expenditures in the budget for the NT's Department of Children and Families. 92 per cent of children in out of home care in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal children; with 82 per cent of all removals being deemed as 'neglect', the lowest level of risk in the continuum of child protection. Across the country, Aboriginal children of the Northern Territory are the least likely to be placed with Aboriginal family of anywhere in Australia, with on average only 19 per cent of all children in placements in the care of family or kin<sup>2</sup>. A majority of these children are victim survivors of Domestic and Family Violence – yet the referrals from Child Protection to specialist Domestic and Family Violence providers, such as WoSSCA, accounts for the lowest of our referral sources: at just 2 per cent of all referrals.

WoSSCA supports the NT Coroner's recommendation following the Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurk, Kumarn Rubunka and Kumanjayi Haywood for the Department of Children and Families to audit its current use of – and continue its commitment – to the Safe and Together Framework. We would recommend that focusing on strengthening the use of existing evidence-based Frameworks, alongside greater training, development, and resourcing across Child Protection, is a far more beneficial priority than the weakening of existing Principles that risk overall poorer outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2024) [Determinants of health for First Nations people](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 21 May 2026.

<sup>2</sup> SNAICC 27 February 2025

**Addressing underlying causes of harm, rather than creating additional under-resourced service system**

With the proposed amendments, women – in particular Aboriginal women and Aboriginal mothers – will bear the weight of penalties and are at greater risk of having their children removed, while simultaneously being blamed for their removal. The proposed amendments outline increased expectations on ‘parents’ to engage with services and comply with directions and expands the Territory’s statutory authority to intervene earlier in family life. In addition to this, these amendments outline a goal of increasing connections between child protection, housing, policing and welfare systems – yet we would argue that a review of similar inter agency frameworks (such as the Family Safety Framework), would indicate that it is more often than not a mother’s capacity, care and responsibility for a child that is scrutinised – while those primarily causing harm are often left without the necessary supports – or even direct engagement – fundamental to increasing a family’s safety.

The Northern Territory continues to experience some of the highest poverty rates in Australia, with Aboriginal women disproportionately affected due to structural barriers to economic security such as significant and often invisible caring responsibilities; unpaid domestic labour; domestic, family and sexual violence; limited to no access to childcare; high living costs (particularly in remote locations); lack of appropriate supports; and a severe shortage of safe and affordable accommodation. Genuine efforts in reducing the number of children at risk of harm, and subsequently entering the Child Protection system, requires greater investment in prevention and early intervention programs (that are genuinely aligned with DFSV best practice and frameworks, and are not an afterthought).

WoSSCA recommends that reducing poverty, improving access to stable and affordable housing, addressing intergenerational trauma, preventing systemic racism across policing, child protection, judicial and health services, funding culturally-safe intensive family support and early intervention programs, mental health services, and a greater investment in DFSV services for both victim survivors and people using violence would be far more beneficial than record spending in out of home care; youth detention and an independent review into the current Child Protection system (in its current proposed form).

**Align expectations with the realities of people’s lives and increase opportunities for families – rather than reducing reunification windows and introducing punitive agreements, orders and frameworks**

Lowering the threshold for intervention into family life without clear frameworks or adequate supports for genuine early intervention creates greater scope for further harm, rather than better outcomes. Recently, we’ve heard accounts from Child Protection workers who are feeling overburdened and under-resourced – with over 100 active open investigations in Alice Springs alone at any one time.

Introducing intervening measures for a child's 'wellbeing' – with no clear wellbeing framework  
[REDACTED] concerns on how wellbeing will be determined; if they 'might' be in need  
[REDACTED] protection workers will be equipped (while already requiring additional  
[REDACTED] training and support) to address these proposed new measures.

Introducing concepts in which a family must be responsible, such as 'events of concern', anti-social behaviour, school non-attendance, and family circumstances contributing to poor outcomes – does little to provide clarity on what assessments, systems and frameworks will be used in conjunction to these concerns in order to not further scrutinise families who are experiencing homelessness; mothers who are experiencing Domestic and Family Violence; and those who have no financial security. These amendments fall tremendously short of recognising the reality of people's lives within the NT, particularly in regional and remote communities. In Alice Springs, for example, it would be unequitable for a mother to be penalised for her child's non-attendance at school – while at the same time not addressing ongoing underlying issues such as inadequate transport options.

In further consideration of this, we strongly oppose a focus on long-term care orders and requirements for reunification efforts to be within a two-year timeframe without, once again, deeply considering the realities of peoples lives, access to fundamental needs such as safe and affordable housing and access to the support services which would provide assistance.

WoSSCA would also question the effectiveness of Family Responsibility Agreements (FRA) and suggest that an audit into recent FRA's and/or those completed by the Circuit Breaker Program be evaluated before FRA's and Family Responsibility Orders are extended more broadly, or are used for a Court to impose even stronger orders. Initially developed in an attempt to address, it appears, concerns primarily around 'anti-social behaviour' – we would ask that further evidence be provided in their effectiveness to support a family holistically and would once again note, that our service has received no direct referrals as a result of a FRA in support of mother's or young people experiencing DFSV, despite internal policies outlining that for any matter in which a member of the family has experienced DFSV, a referral to a specialist DFSV service should be completed.

## **Summary**

WoSSCA joins other key agencies across the Northern Territory who oppose the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (every Child Matters) Bill 2026. We call for the retention and strengthening of existing child protection safeguards, Principles and frameworks; a greater investment in prevention, early intervention, housing, DFSV services, therapeutic services and culturally-safe family support services; stronger accountability and supports for people using violence; and amendments, legislation and policies to be informed by those with lived-experience. We strongly believe that these proposed amendments risk increasing harm to Aboriginal families in particular – rather than improving safety and wellbeing.



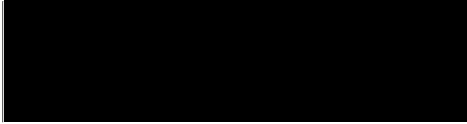
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Sincerely,



Larissa Ellis

CEO

21 May 2026



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*Our vision is that all women and children live safely, with respect and dignity, free from violence*