

To the members of the Legislative Scrutiny Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition of the passage of the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026. I write both as concerned community member and ACCHO health worker that had been working with Northern Territory families and communities for the last ten years, pursuing evidence based, long term health and social outcomes.

Having reviewed the Bill, I feel the proposed reforms do not seem to follow that same evidence based approach. I believe the proposed changes leave significant risk for children and families, especially in regards to the child protection system.

A key concern is the proposed two-year limit on short-term protection orders. Productivity Commission data from 2025 indicates that around 70% of children in out-of-home care in the Northern Territory remain in care for longer than two years, meaning many children would be placed on a pathway toward long-term orders under the proposed reforms.

This has significant implications for reunification and appears inconsistent with the Department of Children and Families' Safer Together policy, which emphasises maintaining safe connections with the non-offending parent wherever possible. A fixed two-year timeframe does not reflect the realities faced by many families, particularly given limited access to housing and support services. Current wait times for emergency and social housing in the Northern Territory can range from four to ten years, making reunification within two years unrealistic for many families.

The reforms risk increasing long-term child removal without sufficient investment in the underlying drivers of child protection involvement, including housing insecurity, substance use support, and culturally appropriate services. There should be consideration of the comparative costs of residential care placements versus investment in housing and wraparound family supports.

I am also concerned that the Bill may discourage victim-survivors of domestic and family violence from seeking help if they believe engagement with services could increase the risk of child protection involvement.

In addition, the Northern Territory child protection workforce is already under significant strain. Acting CEO Karen Broadfoot has stated that only approximately 75% of child protection roles are currently filled. Expanding intervention and compliance requirements without addressing workforce shortages may place further pressure on an overstretched system.

I recommend that the Committee require meaningful consultation with frontline services, the DFSV sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations, housing and health services, as well as unions and workforce representatives before progressing legislative amendments.

There is strong evidence that the best outcomes for children are achieved when families are supported to care for them safely. I request that the Committee carefully consider whether the Bill is evidence-based, achievable within current system capacity, and likely to actually improve long-term, outcomes for children and families in the NT.