

Community Support and Services Committee

From: Julia Rothwell [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 30 November 2021 6:33 AM
To: Community Support and Services Committee
Subject: Raising the Age of Responsibility Amendment Bill: submission

I wish to make a submission regarding the Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021.

Julia Rothwell
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It is important that, as a civilised and educated society, we keep very young children out of the criminal justice system. I speak as a highly experienced teacher of public school children of all nationalities and backgrounds. Rigorous, practical research demonstrates that alternative constructive programs result in less re-offending, a more productive future and, ultimately, far less community expense.

I recently undertook 2 weeks of hotel detention for the good of my community and even that brief period of being confined was quite challenging. I am a highly educated, economically privileged, healthy woman with a stable family life; **what does a worse kind of detention do to a deprived and dislocated child?** At ten years old, the majority of children are still small enough for a car booster seat. They are still losing baby teeth. Their young brains are a critical stage of development.

The medical evidence is clear; children under the age of 14 years old do not have the cognitive development to be held criminally responsible. Any exposure to the criminal justice system is likely to cause them lifelong harm. In 2020 alone almost 500 children aged between 10 years old and 14 have been arrested by police or locked away behind bars. The majority of these children are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

We should be helping children learn from their mistakes and find a place in society, not excluding them for life.

There are alternatives that work. Right around the country, community-driven solutions such as outdoor education, trust building strategies, intensive family support programs, trauma-informed mentorship and on-country learning are supporting children to learn from their mistakes instead of consigning them to a cage.

I hope our state community can do better than criminalising children. Please, raise the age to at least 14 this year, and ensure our most vulnerable children get the support they need.

Julia Rothwell