



Common Grace Submission

Re: Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021

To: To the Community Support and Services Committee,
CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

BY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

30 November 2021

Re: Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021

A Christian response to Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility in Queensland

Dear Community Support and Services Committee,

The Common Grace Movement

Common Grace is a growing movement of over 50,000 Australians pursuing Jesus and Justice.

The Common Grace movement works towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice, Creation and Climate Justice, Justice for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees, and Domestic and Family Violence Justice.

We are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Leaders to pursue friendship and Reconciliation in our lifetime. This is role modelled in the fact that the CEO of our movement, Brooke Prentis, is an Aboriginal person, a descendant of the Wakka Wakka peoples. Brooke is the first Aboriginal person to be appointed as the CEO or National Leader of a Christian organisation in Australia.

Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility

The Common Grace movement would like to comment on the Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021, and express our support for an alternative, non-punitive model for children and young peoples under 14 years of age.

Aboriginal children and young people are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, making up around 84% of children aged 10-13 in detention in Queensland, and around 90% of 10-13 year olds held in watch houses. This injustice stems from the consequences of colonisation and government policies that have resulted in many Aboriginal peoples, families and communities being trapped in cycles of poverty.

Aboriginal peoples have incredible resilience and hold core values of family, community, love for Creator God and love for each other. Aboriginal families and communities know what works for them, so they *must* be 'in the driver's seat'. Funding for Aboriginal-led solutions should be prioritised in any policy and legislation.

Queensland's current laws, which allow 10 year old children to be imprisoned, are out of line with international jurisdictions, in breach of our human rights obligations, and are simply just not working to keep the community safe.

Medical and criminological evidence shows that therapeutic and diversionary responses are far more effective than a criminal one for young children. Children arrested *before* the age of 14 are three times more likely to reoffend as adults than children that are arrested after they're 14 years old.

In addition to supporting the 'Raising the Age of Responsibility' Bill, I urge you to support an independent review of service availability and gaps for children under 14 years of age in Queensland, similar to the process undertaken by the ACT Government to raise the age.

A new model for children under 14 should include:

- Prevention and early intervention, including funding for social services like healthcare, free school meals and housing
- A multidisciplinary expert panel or commission outside of Youth Justice and Child Safety to respond to low-level anti-social behaviour; working with a child and their family to refer them to services such as youth drug rehabilitation treatment, trauma-informed mental healthcare, family therapy, specialised disability support services, cultural strengthening programs and restorative justice
- Tailored, therapeutic wrap-around services to respond to serious harmful behaviour

One week before the new Closing the Gap targets were released in 2020, federal and state Attorneys-General deferred their decision of raising the age of criminal responsibility for 12 months. It is now well past 12 months.

We must act now to disrupt cycles of disadvantage and trauma in the criminal legal system. Please support a new, evidence-based approach that treats children as children, not criminals.

Submission made by Common Grace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Coordinator Bianca Manning.

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