

Expanding Adult Time, Adult Crime and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026

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Submission to the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee

**Inquiry into the Expanding Adult Crime,
Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on
Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour
Amendment Bill 2026**

When the State is the Parent:

**Strengthening Community Safety Through
Evidence-Based Responses for Children and
Young People**

**Submission by
Central Queensland Indigenous Development
(CQID)**

Date: March 2026

Executive Summary

Central Queensland Indigenous Development (CQID) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee regarding the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026.

CQID recognises the serious impacts that youth offending can have on victims, families and communities. Ensuring community safety is a shared priority across government, service providers and communities. CQID believes that improving community safety requires responses that reduce offending behaviour in the long term while supporting children to develop positive pathways and be contributing members of their community.

CQID is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation working across Central Queensland, the Fraser Coast and the Wide Bay Burnett region to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families through culturally grounded services spanning child protection, youth programs, family support and community development initiatives. Through this work CQID regularly supports children and families experiencing complex disadvantage and interaction with statutory systems.

CQID acknowledges the leadership of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) and supports alignment across the Aboriginal community controlled sector in responding to reforms that will significantly impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

CQID does not support the expansion of punitive youth justice responses proposed within the Bill, including the extension of adult sentencing frameworks to additional offences, the reduction of diversion opportunities and the expansion of police enforcement powers. CQID is concerned that these measures risk increasing justice system involvement for vulnerable children without addressing the structural drivers of youth offending.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that many young people entering the youth justice system are already known to the child protection system and have experienced significant trauma, disadvantage and disconnection from education, family and community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are particularly affected by these intersecting factors and remain significantly over-represented across both systems.

CQID's experience working alongside children and families' highlights the importance of early intervention, culturally informed responses and community-led solutions. Programs that strengthen families, reconnect young people to culture and education, and provide therapeutic support are more effective in reducing offending behaviour and supporting long-term community safety than punitive responses alone.

CQID therefore encourages policy responses that prioritise prevention, diversion and community-controlled approaches that address the underlying drivers of youth offending while strengthening children, families and communities.

Key Policy Messages

Key Message	Description
Youth justice cannot be separated from child protection	A large proportion of young people in the youth justice system have prior contact with the child protection system.
Punitive responses alone do not reduce youth offending	Evidence shows high recidivism rates following detention.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately impacted	Legislative reforms must consider their impact on over-representation.
Structural drivers of youth offending must be addressed	Trauma, disability, educational disengagement and exploitation influence offending pathways.
Diversion and therapeutic responses are more effective	Health-based responses and early intervention reduce justice system involvement.
Community-controlled organisations are critical	ACCOs provide culturally safe services and strengthen families and communities.

1. Introduction and CQID Context

CQID is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) with more than two decades of experience delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families across Central Queensland and surrounding regions. CQID's service system spans child protection, family support, cultural strengthening, youth programs, housing and community development initiatives.

CQID's submission is informed by direct frontline practice experience working alongside children and families who are often experiencing complex disadvantage and involvement with statutory systems. Through this work CQID regularly engages with children and young people who have had contact with both the child protection and youth justice systems.

Through its service delivery and engagement with children and families, CQID consistently observes the complex relationship between trauma, child protection involvement, educational disengagement and youth justice system contact. These experiences strongly inform CQID's perspective that effective youth justice policy must prioritise early intervention, prevention and community-led solutions.

2. CQID's Practice Perspective on Pathways into Youth Justice

CQID's experience working with children and families demonstrates that many young people entering the youth justice system are not unknown to government systems.

Queensland data confirms the strong relationship between the child protection and youth justice systems. The Queensland Family and Child Commission's Crossover Cohort analysis found that 72.9% of children under youth justice supervision had prior interaction with the child protection system.¹

For younger children the overlap is even more significant. Queensland recorded 686 children aged 10–13 years under youth justice supervision who had previous interaction with the child protection system, of whom 78.6% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.²

These findings reflect CQID's frontline experience. Many young people entering the youth justice system have experienced cumulative disadvantage including trauma, unstable care arrangements, housing insecurity, poverty and educational disengagement.

For many children, behavioural issues that later attract justice responses emerge in the context of unmet needs and systemic gaps rather than deliberate criminal intent.

CQID therefore considers that youth justice policy must be understood within the broader context of child protection, education and community wellbeing systems. Without addressing these structural conditions, justice responses alone are unlikely to improve long-term community safety.

3. Criminalising Trauma Rather Than Addressing Its Causes

CQID is concerned that policy responses focused primarily on punishment risk criminalising trauma rather than addressing its causes.

Children and young people have not yet reached full neurological maturity. Developmental science demonstrates that adolescents are more susceptible to impulsivity and peer influence than adults.³ For this reason youth justice systems internationally emphasise rehabilitation rather than punitive responses.

Many children who enter the youth justice system have experienced significant trauma including family violence, neglect, grief and intergenerational disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are particularly affected by these experiences.⁴

Behaviour that later attracts justice responses may reflect trauma responses, developmental delay, cognitive impairment or exposure to violence rather than deliberate criminal intent.

Where responses focus only on punishment without addressing these underlying circumstances, the justice system risks compounding trauma rather than supporting rehabilitation.

4. The State as Parent: Child Protection and Responsibility

A significant number of children who enter the youth justice system are already subject to statutory child protection intervention.

National data demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost eleven times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.⁵

Family Matters reports consistently highlight the relationship between child protection involvement and later youth justice contact, reinforcing the importance of early intervention and culturally informed support systems.⁶

Where children are already subject to child protection orders or living in out-of-home care placements, the State effectively assumes the role of parent. In these circumstances, policy responses that expand punitive justice responses must be carefully considered in light of the State's existing responsibility to protect and act in the best interests of those children. Evidence consistently demonstrates that punitive responses alone do not improve outcomes for vulnerable children and may increase the likelihood of deeper justice system involvement, raising important questions about whether such approaches align with the State's responsibility as parent to act in the child's best interests.

5. Structural Drivers of Youth Offending

CQID's practice experience highlights that youth offending behaviour is often shaped by complex structural factors rather than isolated acts of criminal intent.

Under-diagnosed disability

Research indicates that 50–60% of young people in detention may have cognitive or developmental impairments, including conditions such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.⁷

Many children do not receive timely developmental assessments or support services. Behaviour associated with disability or trauma may therefore be misinterpreted as antisocial behaviour.

The *Include Me, Don't Exclude Me* report found that 55% of children in youth detention were not engaged in education prior to detention, while 94% of children at risk of detention had disengaged from school.⁸

Educational disengagement is therefore a significant risk factor for justice system involvement. However, evidence suggests that exclusionary or segregated responses do not address this

issue. Instead, improving outcomes requires supporting vulnerable children to remain connected to education through culturally safe learning environments, early intervention supports and community-led education models.

Substance use and lack of diversion pathways

Evidence from the alcohol and other drug sector demonstrates that health-based responses are more effective than punitive responses in addressing problematic substance use.¹⁰

Diversion programs that connect individuals with treatment and support services can interrupt pathways into the justice system.

Adult exploitation

Children experiencing trauma, poverty or unstable living arrangements may also be vulnerable to exploitation by older individuals involved in criminal activity. Young people who are disengaged from family supports, sleeping rough, or moving between unstable placements may be particularly at risk of exploitation.

This vulnerability is especially relevant for children who are already involved in the child protection system. Where children experience placement instability, unmet needs or disengagement from care arrangements, they may seek connection, safety or belonging elsewhere. In these circumstances, older individuals may exploit that vulnerability by grooming, coercing or manipulating young people to participate in criminal activity.

Research in youth justice and criminology has identified that vulnerable children can be coerced, groomed or manipulated by older offenders to participate in criminal activity, particularly where children lack stable support networks or are seeking protection or belonging.

In some cases, young people may also be exposed to substance use, financial exploitation or sexual exploitation as part of these relationships. These circumstances reinforce the importance of recognising that some children who appear before the justice system may themselves be victims of exploitation.

Policy responses must therefore recognise the broader context in which offending behaviour occurs and ensure that vulnerable children are not solely treated as perpetrators when they may also be victims of exploitation.

6. Diversion and Therapeutic Responses

CQID acknowledges the importance of community safety and accountability.

However, evidence consistently demonstrates that punitive responses alone do not reduce youth offending.

Diversion programs allow young people to address underlying issues such as trauma, substance use and mental health concerns while remaining connected to family, culture and community.

The Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies notes that enforcement-based strategies alone do not effectively reduce substance use harms and that treatment and harm reduction responses are more effective.¹¹

CQID therefore supports continued investment in diversionary pathways and therapeutic responses.

7. Community-Led and Culturally Grounded Solutions

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are uniquely positioned to deliver effective responses because they operate within the communities they serve and are built on relationships of trust, cultural authority and local knowledge.

CQID's experience working with children and families demonstrates that strengthening cultural identity, connection to community and engagement with education are critical protective factors for young people who may otherwise become involved in the youth justice system.

CQID is developing culturally grounded education initiatives such as the Nullu Badi Ngudyubay Academy (NBNA), a community-designed education model developed through extensive consultation with Elders, families and community across Central Queensland. The Academy aims to reconnect young people with education through culturally safe, place-based learning environments that strengthen identity, belonging and engagement with learning.

The model integrates cultural knowledge and language with the Australian Curriculum and emphasises personalised learning pathways that respond to the needs of young people who may otherwise disengage from mainstream education. By strengthening cultural connection and educational engagement, initiatives such as NBNA seek to address some of the underlying drivers that contribute to youth justice involvement.

Importantly, community-led education initiatives differ significantly from justice-linked education responses. Their focus is on early intervention, prevention and cultural reconnection, rather than responding to behavioural issues once young people have already become entrenched in justice systems.

CQID also supports the continued expansion of Delegated Authority arrangements, which enable Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to participate directly in decision-making about the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Delegated Authority reflects the principle of self-determination and ensures decisions affecting Aboriginal children are informed by cultural knowledge, community connection and local expertise.

Programs such as Staying on Track further demonstrate the value of mentoring and early intervention approaches that support young people to remain connected to education, culture

and community. These programs work alongside young people and families to address challenges before they escalate into justice system involvement.

Case Study: Staying on Track – Breaking the Cycle of Detention

A young person referred to CQID's Staying on Track program had experienced repeated cycles of detention and release over several years, frequently returning to detention within days of release with limited community-based support beyond statutory supervision.

*Since engaging with the Staying on Track mentoring program, the young person has remained in the community for approximately **twelve weeks** without returning to detention - the longest period of stability they had experienced in more than three years.*

Prior to engagement with the program, the young person presented with several vulnerabilities including suspected ADHD, mild intellectual impairment and communication challenges, alongside disengagement from school and substance use in the community.

Staying on Track mentors commenced engagement with the young person while they were still in detention, focusing on building trust and establishing consistent support prior to release. Support included mentoring visits in detention, regular communication through video calls, advocacy during court processes and engagement with the young person's family to strengthen community supports.

This case highlights the importance of relationship-based mentoring and early engagement during detention, demonstrating how consistent support can interrupt cycles of detention and assist young people to transition more successfully back into the community.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap recognises that outcomes improve when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lead the design and delivery of services affecting their people. Strengthening community-controlled responses across education, family support and youth services is therefore critical to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the youth justice system and improving long-term outcomes for children and families.¹²

8. Community Safety Requires Evidence-Based Policy

CQID acknowledges community concerns regarding youth crime.

However evidence indicates that punitive responses alone do not reduce offending.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission reported that 84–96% of young people released from detention reoffended within twelve months.¹⁴

Nationally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people represent around 60% of young people in detention despite representing only around 6.6% of the youth population.¹⁵

These findings demonstrate the need for policy responses that address the drivers of youth offending through prevention, diversion and community-led solutions.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

CQID recognises the importance of community safety and acknowledges the concerns expressed by communities across Queensland regarding youth crime and the impacts of offending behaviour on victims, families and local communities.

However, evidence consistently demonstrates that punitive responses alone do not address the underlying drivers of youth offending and are unlikely to produce sustainable improvements in community safety. Many children who enter the youth justice system have experienced significant trauma, disadvantage and disconnection from family, education and community. A large proportion are also already known to the child protection system, reflecting the complex intersection between care, vulnerability and justice system involvement.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, these issues are compounded by longstanding structural disadvantage and systemic over-representation across both the child protection and youth justice systems.

CQID therefore does not support the expansion of punitive youth justice responses proposed within the Bill, including the extension of adult sentencing frameworks to additional offences, the reduction of diversion opportunities and the expansion of police powers.

CQID's experience working alongside children and families reinforces that effective responses to youth offending must focus on early intervention, culturally informed support and community-led solutions that strengthen families and communities.

Programs that reconnect young people with education, provide therapeutic support, strengthen cultural identity and address underlying challenges such as trauma, disability and substance use are more effective in supporting behavioural change and reducing long-term justice system involvement.

CQID therefore encourages the Committee to ensure that legislative reforms affecting children and young people are informed by evidence, recognise the intersection between child protection and youth justice systems, and support policy approaches that prioritise prevention, diversion and community-controlled responses.

Strengthening early intervention and community-led solutions will not only improve outcomes for children and families but will also contribute to safer and stronger communities across Queensland.

10. References and Evidence Base

Ref	Organisation	Report / Publication	Key Evidence Referenced	Location in Report	Link
1	Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)	<i>The Crossover Cohort: Understanding the relationship between the child protection and youth justice systems in Queensland (2024)</i>	72.9% of children under youth justice supervision had prior interaction with the child protection system	Data Insights section, pp. 3–5	https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/Crossover%20Cohort%20-%20Data%20Insights.pdf
2	Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)	<i>Annual Report on the Performance of the Queensland Child Protection System 2024–25</i>	686 children aged 10–13 under youth justice supervision previously known to child protection, 78.6% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Youth Justice and crossover cohort analysis sections	https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au
3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS)	<i>Submission: Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025</i>	Evidence regarding adolescent brain development and impacts of punitive sentencing frameworks on children	Brain development and sentencing policy discussion sections	https://atsils.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Submission-2025-Making-Qld-Safer-Adult-Crime-Adult-Time-Amendment-Bill-2025-15-Apr-25.pdf

4	SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children	<i>Family Matters Report 2023</i>	Analysis of trauma, disadvantage and systemic drivers contributing to youth justice involvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	Chapters on child protection and justice system intersection	https://www.familymatters.org.au
5	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)	<i>Child Protection Australia 2022–23</i>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost 11 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care	Table S7 and Indigenous child protection overview tables	https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia
6	SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children	<i>Family Matters Report 2023</i>	Evidence highlighting relationship between child protection involvement and youth justice pathways	Justice system intersection sections	https://www.familymatters.org.au
7	Various research cited in ATSILS submission	Youth Justice and cognitive impairment research	Estimated 50–60% of young people in detention experience cognitive impairment or neurodevelopmental disability	Referenced within ATSILS submission research citations	See ATSILS submission above
8	Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner (Qld)	<i>Include Me, Don’t Exclude Me (2025)</i>	55% of children in youth detention were not engaged in education, training or employment prior to detention	p.13	https://cfecfw.org.au/app/uploads/2025/11/Report-Include-me-dont-exclude-me.pdf
9	Queensland Family and Child	Analysis cited within <i>Include Me,</i>	Review of pre-sentence reports found 94% of children at risk of	Education disengagement analysis section	Referenced within above report

	Commission (QFCC)	<i>Don't Exclude Me</i>	detention had disengaged from school		
10	Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (QNADA)	<i>Policy Positions – Effective Responses to Drug Use</i>	Health-based responses and treatment pathways are more effective than punitive enforcement approaches	Drug policy and treatment sections	https://qnada.org.au/our-policy-positions/
11	Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (QNADA)	<i>Decriminalisation and Justice System Reform Position Statements</i>	Law enforcement-only approaches do not effectively reduce drug use harms	Policy position statements	https://qnada.org.au/our-policy-positions/
12	Australian Governments	<i>National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020)</i>	Priority Reform 2 emphasises strengthening the community-controlled sector to improve outcomes	Priority Reform 2 section	https://www.closingthegap.gov.au
13	Queensland Human Rights Commission	<i>Submission to Inquiry into Adult Crime Adult Time Bill 2025</i>	Harsher sentencing frameworks for children unlikely to deter offending and may increase long-term harm	Human rights compatibility analysis sections	Queensland Parliament Committee submissions
14	Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)	<i>Exiting Youth Detention: Preventing Crime by Improving Transitions to Adulthood (2024)</i>	Between 84–96% of young people released from youth detention reoffended within 12 months	Recidivism statistics section	https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Exiting%20youth%20detention%20report%20June%202024.pdf

15	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)	<i>Youth Detention Population in Australia 2024</i>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people represent ~60% of children in detention despite representing ~6.6% of youth population	Summary statistics section	https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2024
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