

# Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## Putting kids in an adult prison – is this what a civilised society would do?

8 January 2015

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APONT) have serious concerns about the treatment of young people in detention. APONT has previously called for the NT Government to reverse its decision to use Berrimah Prison as a youth detention centre.

‘Is putting kids in an adult prison something that is done in a civilized society?’ said AMSANT CEO, John Paterson. ‘Whatever the operational needs, you can’t put kids into a prison that was closed because it was too old and run down to meet the needs of adults.’

Section 151 of the Youth Justice Act requires that the Superintendent of a youth detention centre:

- a) must promote programs to assist and organise activities of detainees to enhance their wellbeing; and
- b) must encourage the social development and improvement of the welfare of detainees; and
- c) must maintain order and ensure the safe custody and protection of all persons who are within the precincts of the detention centre, whether as detainees or otherwise; and
- d) is responsible for the maintenance and efficient conduct of the detention centre; and
- e) must supervise the health of detainees, including the provision of medical treatment and, where necessary, authorise the removal of a detainee to a hospital for medical treatment.

In a court matter on 7 January 2015, her Honour Ms Armitage SM made comment that the current environment at the Berrimah YDC is one where there are limited programs, no therapeutic interventions and the approach is principally one of containment, rather than giving sufficient weight to rehabilitation. Her Honour said this is very concerning.

APO NT is alarmed at the frequent movement of young people in detention from Don Dale, to Holtze, and to Berrimah since August 2014. APONT is also alarmed at the frequent, serious incidents occurring during this time. We note that the Vita Youth Detention Review is soon to be handed to Government and that it will consider some of these incidents. But the community should expect that all serious incidents in detention will be independently and transparently investigated in a timely manner.

APONT calls on the NT Government to:

1. urgently commission a purpose-built youth detention facility in the Top End;
2. honour its election commitment to establish an office of the Inspector of Correctional Services, an expert who could examine systemic issues in youth detention;

3. independently and transparently investigate the events of 4 January 2015.

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