



15 March 2023

Standing Council of Attorneys-General
3-5 National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600

Dear Attorneys General,

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) joins other faith communities in calling upon your governments to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years of age. The continuing incarceration of children below the age of 14 throughout Australia, and particularly of Aboriginal and Torres Islander children, is a national shame.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA), Amnesty International, Law Council of Australia, Royal College of Australian Physicians and United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommend the age of criminal responsibility be raised to 14 years of age.

They all refer to a significant body of evidence on child brain development that children under the age of 14 may not have developed enough neurologically to have the required capacity to be criminally responsible.

There is extensive national and international evidence demonstrating that incarceration is ineffective in keeping the community safe or reducing crime, while also causing long-term negative effects. According to the AMA, children in contact with the criminal legal system are likely to suffer worse health, educational and employment outcomes and are "more likely to die an early death".

Instead of incarceration, governments should prioritise justice reinvestment and fund therapeutic and rehabilitative methods like diversion programs that address the underlying causes of problematic behaviour in children, diverting them away from the criminal justice system. Children who complete diversion programs are much less likely to reoffend resulting in better outcomes both for themselves and the community. We agree with the head of NT police in Alice Springs - you can't go your way out of deep social problems affecting vulnerable families and their children.

Australia Yearly Meeting

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The sooner we raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years and allocate funding away from incarceration to assistance and support for vulnerable youth the sooner we will see the positive social outcomes outlined in the research.

We therefore urge you to listen to the experts in the field and unanimously recommend your governments raise the age of criminality to at least 14 years of age in this term of office.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Henry', with a horizontal line underneath.

Bruce Henry
Presiding Clerk
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia

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