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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Legal services call for change as ABC Four Corners reveals the abuse of children in police watchhouses**

The National Peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) calls for urgent change to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the justice system, following last night's [ABC's Four Corners](#) which exposed horrific abuses of children aged 10-17 held in police watchhouses in Queensland.

"We cannot stand by while children are being denied their rights. Reports of Queensland Police housing children with sex offenders, withholding food and medical treatment to children as young as 10 are unacceptable. Some children have even had their fingers cut off. The Queensland Government must take immediate action to end these abuses," said Cheryl Axleby, Co-chair, NATSILS.

"There are clear solutions to the problem of overcrowded watchhouses and youth justice centres. By raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14, we can give our children the support they need in community and ease the pressure on overcrowded justice system," said Ms Axleby.

Raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 would bring Australia into line with global standards. This means that more children can get the help they need in communities without the trauma and abuse of custody.

NATSILS calls for the creation of culturally-safe accommodation and supports in communities to eliminate the practice of holding children in watchhouses.

"Watchhouses are no place for children. Our kids have a right to be safe and the Queensland Government has failed in this responsibility."

The justice system is stacked against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at every step of the way. In Queensland, 58% of children in prisons are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, with prison populations in Townsville often reaching 100% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

NATSILS calls for the Queensland Government to listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

"Our communities have the answers. These children should be in community, in homes and in schools. We're talking about children's lives and the Government must support them, our future knowledge holders," concluded Ms Axleby.

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