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MEDIA RELEASE “The Custody Notification Service and fine reforms will save lives,” NATSILS welcomes historic justice reforms in Western Australia.

Today, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) alongside Aboriginal Legal Service Western Australia (ALSWA) is pleased to announce that the Custody Notification Service is now fully operational in Western Australia.

A recommendation from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Custody Notification Services exist to protect the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reduce deaths in custody.

Dennis Eggington, CEO of ALSWA, stated that “It’s an absolute tragedy that over 400 of our people have died in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). Most of these deaths occurred in Western Australia.”

The service, established and run by ALSWA, employs 5 lawyers and 2 Aboriginal support workers to provide assistance to Aboriginal people in police custody, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Cheryl Axleby, co-chair of NATSILS stated that, “Custody Notification Services run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services save lives.” Mr Eggington added that, “since NSW established a CNS eighteen years ago, there has been one Indigenous death in custody, which shows this really is a lifesaving service.”

The announcement comes within a week of the vital reforms to laws which saw many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people imprisoned for unpaid fines. Ms Axleby said “the Fines, Penalties and Infringement Notices Enforcement Amendment Bill 2019 is long overdue to implement the recommendation from the Coronial Inquiry into the tragic death of Ms Dhu, who was taken into custody on a warrant of commitment for unpaid fines in 2014.”

“This is an important day for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Western Australia. CNS and fine reform are both the result of years of tireless advocacy from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and communities,” noted Ms Axleby.

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