

# No pepper spray, no guns on buses: 'tough on crime' won't produce safer communities

## Civil Society Open Letter to the Finocchiaro Government

Safety in the Northern Territory is a complex and polarising issue. The situation at present is becoming untenable and 'tough on crime' reactions can do more harm than good. We, the undersigned civil society and grassroots organisations, call on the NT Government to take active steps to build thriving and safer communities.

We acknowledge that crime needs to be addressed, but the NT Government's law-and-order policies have the consequence of negatively impacting mainly Indigenous families and communities, while not doing enough to address the root causes of harm. We believe the NT Government must implement evidence-based initiatives, and we strongly believe that Indigenous-led community safety models must be part of the solution.

We are alarmed about the potential consequences of NT Government policies. Arming the public with pepper spray risks escalating violent incidents. Allowing guns on public transport and in public housing exposes the poor and marginalised to an increased risk of violence, arrest and even the possibility of deaths in custody.

The NT Government is rolling out these initiatives in the name of victims of crime. However, ill-thought-out reactions can result in victims of crime not being protected at all. There is no evidence that spreading weapons through our community deters or reduces crime in the long term.

We know what works: addressing poverty, trauma and discrimination, as well as helping people regain a sense of identity. There must be consequences for wrongdoing, but increasing the incarceration rate is a simplistic response to a complicated reality. We need to help people rebuild their lives with the support of their families and communities. If we do this, crime is much less likely to occur.

NT Government policies need to reduce fear and make everyone feel safe and welcome in the community. Significant investments are needed across multiple sectors; safe and affordable housing, mental health, education, alcohol and other drug services, justice reinvestment, youth services and other structural supports are required to reduce the risk of violence and keep people out of prison.



## Quotes attributable to signatories:



**Thomas Mayo**  
**Spokesperson**

“On the eve of the commencement of the pepper spray trial we are urging the Finocchiaro Government to change the course they are setting for the Territory. We have seen law after detrimental law introduced, laws that criminalise our youth, introduce weapons into our community, and further marginalise and incarcerate Aboriginal communities. Record high incarceration rates and more weapons in our community will not make anyone safer. Justice not Jails is urging the CLP to listen to the evidence and to the signatories of this letter.”

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**Victims of Crime NT**

**Gerard McGeough**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

“At Victims of Crime NT we see the impacts of crime on Territorians and the economy every single day and understand why this is a serious priority for government. VoCNT emboldens Government to propel community growth and change away from reaction, rhetoric, and short-term cursory fixes very likely to deepen social issues and have inordinate economic consequences for every-day Territorians. VoCNT encourages and supports evidence-based, community led initiatives that honour our collective social responsibility to reduce the social determinants of crime for the benefit of every single Territorian in the long-term.”

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**John Paterson**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

“Weaponising the public as a safety measure defies logic. This policy will only lead to more violence, more people being criminalised, and more pressure on a justice system already stretched beyond breaking point. It is especially dangerous for vulnerable people, including those sleeping rough, many of whom are Aboriginal. Real safety will only come from investing in housing, healthcare and community-led supports that address the root causes of harm.”

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**Jayne Lloyd**  
**Director**

“Pepper spray gives a false sense of safety and risks escalating violence. For victims of domestic and sexual violence in particular, this is deeply concerning, it creates fear, not protection. True safety will never come from weapons in our homes and streets, but from building strong communities where every person feels valued and secure. The government must take a more considered approach that authentically contributes to healing, connection, and long-term community safety, not policies that increase fear and conflict.”

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**Craig Kelly**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

“We need to rethink how we treat people breaking the law. Justice shouldn’t only be about punishment – it should be about fairness, rehabilitation, and the chance for opportunity and change. More than anything, we need to invest in early intervention and prevention to address the root causes of crime. Programs focused on education, mental health support and cultural connection work, ensuring no one is left behind.”

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**Public Health Association**  
AUSTRALIA

**Ruth Canty**  
**NT Spokesperson**

“We urge the government to take real action on addressing the root causes of crime, for the sake of everyone in our community, rather than punitive measures that cause more harm. We are disturbed by the government repeatedly rejecting dissenting views and evidence on this and other issues.”

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**Danila Dilba**<sup>®</sup>  
Health Service

**Rob McPhee**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

“Danila Dilba Health Service believes a safer community will be achieved through evidence-based approaches and improvements in the real root causes of violence - reducing poverty, improving housing and addressing trauma. It will not be achieved by increasing the presence of weapons in our community.”

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**Dr Louise Woodward  
Paediatrician**

“I am very concerned that the NT Government has rejected the previously supported Royal Commission recommendations regarding the care of children in detention and the use of spit hoods. It is hard to believe that the Chief Minister has so casually dismissed warnings that the reforms to the Youth Justice Act could cause harm and even deaths of children in custody from paediatricians and many other experts working in the youth justice space. These so-called reforms risk increasing criminal behaviour and do not address the root causes of youth crime, making us all less safe. The Government should treat youth crime as a public health issue and introduce measures that are both evidence-based and trauma informed in order to improve community safety in the long-term.”

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**Bishop Charles Gauci**

“Sometimes policies made by good people can have unintended consequences. I am aware that the rate of crime is challenging to many people. I am however concerned that a number of aspects of the Government's 'tough on crime' policies have the potential to have unintended consequences that will not in the long term reduce crime. They will also have detrimental effects on the lives of many who are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society. We need a holistic approach to these challenges based on evidence and wisdom. Hence I urge the government to keep reassessing policies for the long-term good of all.”

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**Chay Brown**  
**Co-founder and Managing Director**

“What we'd like to say is that instead of being 'tough on crime', we invite the government to be smart on crime. Introducing more weapons into the Northern Territory flies in the face of the evidence. We know that access to weapons increases the risk and severity of violence, particularly domestic, family, and sexual violence. If we want our communities to be safer and healthier, then we must pay attention to the evidence and address the root causes - that requires collaboration and community-driven solutions. We've had enough of baseless and divisive rhetoric - let's be smarter and let's work together.”

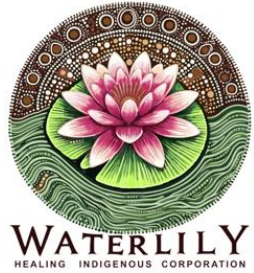
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**Fiona McNaughton**  
**Social Worker & Behaviour Support Practitioner**

“The use of pepper spray by members of the public, who mostly will have very limited knowledge on disability and psycho-social symptoms and presentations, and who will now have agency to freely pepper spray and directly cause harm to any person they feel is a threat, is bound to have serious implications for NDIS participants. These participants and their families are already vulnerable and often marginalised members of our community, and they deserve to feel safe too.”

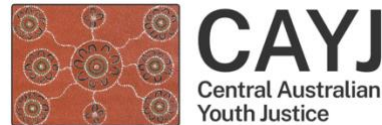
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**Karyn Moyle  
Director & Founder**

“Pepper spray and guns won’t make our communities safer; they will make them more dangerous. These ‘tough on crime’ policies target our people and ignore the real causes of harm. We don’t need more weapons. We need healing, housing, mental health support, and Indigenous-led solutions. Safety comes from community, not fear.”

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**Kirsten Wilson  
NT Coordinator (JRI) and Co-Chair (CAYJN)**

“We need to invest in community-led solutions outside of the justice system if we want to see any real and long-lasting change to community safety”.

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**Michelle Ayers  
President**

“The Australian Curriculum sets out that by the age of eight, young people should learn that hitting back only escalates a fight, and by their teenage years, they should be able to communicate with respect, negotiate differences, and resolve conflict through collaboration. How can we expect our children to grasp these simple concepts when our own Government refuses to follow them? For over a decade, they have drained resources from our most disadvantaged schools, then

they act shocked when crime spikes among the very young people they have failed to support. Instead of taking responsibility for their actions, they chase retaliatory measures that (as any 8-year-old could tell you) will only serve to escalate things. Instead of listening to peer-reviewed evidence, they take policy advice from keyboard warriors. They keep the experts who understand how to fix this locked in departmental silos, cut off from collaboration by red tape, whilst the front-line staff who deal with the consequences are prevented from sharing their experience by a 'code of conduct' and the ever-present fear of a career-threatening 'black mark' if they speak out."

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**Tash Jones**  
**Owner & Founder**

"As someone who has worked in youth and family services within both remote communities and Mparntwe/Alice Springs, and now running my own small business in town, I feel desperately concerned and alarmed about the speed and ferocity of steps this new CLP NT government is taking towards issues faced in our community. There is no doubt that our community faces many problems, and I choose to approach these issues by trying to understand the anger and frustrations that people feel across the spectrum of diversity in this community. My main experience is one of working within youth diversionary and rehabilitation programs for 5 years, and seeing the positive benefits of young people becoming engaged in these programs and supported by their families within community owned, run and led organisations. I have also seen the devastating impact of institutional heavy-handling of these issues, impacts that ruin young people's lives, place enormous pressure on their families, and only continues the cycle of pain and distrust. Our community needs services that address the real needs of young people and their families who are struggling, in close consultation with community leaders, and responding to the plethora of community-led solutions that have been offered for years."

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**Nicole Pietsch  
Chief Executive Officer**

“The Mental Health Association of Central Australia is concerned about new NT Government ‘tough on crime initiatives’ including the pepper spray trial, and the impact it may have on community members, particularly people who may be living with disability, mental health challenges or homelessness. We are concerned that information is not being shared about these measures in formats that are accessible to all community members. We support greater focus on issues like housing, health care and investing in community services to address the root causes of crime and increase safety and wellbeing in our community.”

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**Vital Collective**

“Vital Collective acknowledges and witnesses the serious harm that the carceral and criminal legal systems are causing our community, families and individuals. Queer and trans people are criminalised & incarcerated at higher rates than our straight and cisgender peers. We are more likely to experience long periods of solitary confinement in protective custody, violence from guards & others incarcerated, longer sentences, and stricter bail & parole, than our peers. Sistergirls, Brotherboys and LGBTIQAP\* people already face marginalisation, vilification and exclusion within society, that impacts our health, wellbeing and ability to live in the world. Incarceration only worsens these impacts. We urgently need to fund community initiatives, non-punitive crisis response, supportive measures, survivor support, and transform harmful social relations & behaviours, if we are to achieve real safety, connection and resilience.”