QATSICPP Statement
Friday 25 August 2023
Recent legislation introduced to Queensland Parliament
re: detaining children in adult watch houses and correctional facilities

Yesterday the Queensland Government passed legislative amendments overriding Queensland's *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) (the Act) which allows police watch houses and adult prisons to be used as youth detention centres. This is the second time this Government has overridden the Act, previously doing this to make breach of bail an offence for children.

QATSICPP is deeply concerned that First Nations leaders were not consulted on this decision and as the peak body for 38 community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in Queensland, we call on the Queensland Government to repeal this legislation.

QATSICPP is opposed to the detention of children in any adult correctional facility or police watch house. The significant harm to our society's most vulnerable children and young people by being kept in watch houses is well documented by the Queensland Family and Child Commission and state and national Human Rights Commissions.

The escalating rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's over-representation in Queensland's youth justice system is resulting in significant ongoing trauma for our families and communities around Queensland. These escalating rates are evidence that Queensland's youth justice system is not responding effectively to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and is criminalising commonly associated behavioural responses to trauma, creating further distress in our communities.

We can no longer tolerate these transgressions of our children's rights. Whilst we remain committed to working with the government to create effective long-term solutions to reduce the over-representation of our children in youth justice systems, we must act now to challenge the current discourse of our children as criminals and address the failures to uphold our children's rights currently dominating policy and legislative decision making in our state.

QATSICPP calls on the Queensland Government to work with us and other First Nations leaders and organisations on the following measures to develop and implement more effective trauma informed responses to youth crime.

- Work with First Nations leaders to immediately develop and implement alternatives to the current model of youth detention in operation in Queensland that are effective in increasing community safety and reducing re-offending.

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- Immediately conduct a systemic review of all children on remand, to determine alternative approaches to their custody which would also ensure community safety and ensure children's rights are upheld.
- Work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, elders, and community to develop and implement youth justice responses in Queensland, starting with the co-design of a generational plan to reduce the over-representation of First Nations youth in the system.
- The Queensland First Children and Families Board must be given a greater oversight role in shaping and assessing Youth Justice responses that reduce offending and recidivism.
- Utilise the strong service infrastructure present in our community-controlled organisations to increase the capacity of our communities across multiple areas to address the drivers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's overrepresentation in Queensland's youth justice system.

We want our communities to be safe. QATSICPP is ready and willing to work with government to develop and implement systemic change that enable us to address the complex issues facing our young people and families.

We ask that the Queensland Government respectfully listen and learn from the cultural wisdom of our First Nations leaders, and repeal the laws passed this week. Such a repeal would allow for a meaningful dialogue and avoid proceeding with a legislative approach that will have significant negative impacts and result in escalating experiences of trauma for our children, families and communities.

GARTH MORGAN
Chief Executive Officer