



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Media Release

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The recent introduction of ‘anti-association’ legislation has been met with grave concern by community organisations, with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service joining in the chorus of opposition.

The extension of Police powers to issue anti-association notices to children and young people under the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Unlawful Association and Criminal Appeals) Bill 2018* is anti-democratic and is nothing more than a response to inflammatory mainstream media, says Nerita Waight, Acting CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

“The recent introduction of new anti-association laws will unfairly target Aboriginal children and young people, and further drive up incarceration rates,” says Ms Waight.

The legislation aims to target children of 14 years and over, and given the majority of the Aboriginal community in Victoria is younger than aged 25, these laws will unfairly target Aboriginal children and young people.

The Bill seeks to issue anti-association notices to children and young people with no prior criminal record. A breach of such a notice, however, will result in a criminal record or even jail time. Bizarrely, then, the Labor Government’s plan to reduce youth crime in fact actually will lead to an increase in criminalised young people

“The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service is strongly opposed to the introduction of this Bill, in particular given that the Bill will criminalise Aboriginal children and young people, as well as placing previously innocent young people in a position where they are at far greater risk of entering the criminal justice system.

“That the Bill makes alternative provisions for children, Aboriginal people and those suffering mental health issues – by placing them in the category of ‘vulnerable’ – does not provide any relief,” says Ms Waight.

“In fact, if such persons are deemed so vulnerable then we ask, why introduce these laws at all?”

Concerns have also been raised as to how such notices – and potential breaches – will be monitored.

Aboriginal communities are already over-policed and such new laws will only increase the surveillance required to implement anti-association notices and register breaches. The same over-policing is experienced by South Sudanese communities, and as such, further criminalises communities of colour.

Such laws also have the potential to sever vital relationships between young people and their cultural elders, as well as disrupt the social fabric of Aboriginal communities in regional areas, for whom strong ties with extended family, friends, community elders, social associates (such as sporting team mates) form the basis of a culturally strong upbringing.

“We view these laws as discriminatory and as an attack on our young people, and we will continue to oppose any such legislation that criminalises our community,” says Ms Waight.

For more information and media comment, contact Alister McKeich at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service on 9418 5999 or amckeich@vals.org.au