



Media Release

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Victorian Government's broken promise is a major step backwards towards justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Alongside the groundswell of condemnation from the Victorian Aboriginal community, organisations, leaders, and experts in the field, the Koorie Youth Council (KYC) is deeply disappointed by the Victorian Government's announcement that they will abandon their promise to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14.

Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria must be considered when making decisions about their future. Instead, the Government has caved to the pressure of Victoria Police and fed into the misguided narratives of the media. Young mob and their communities know what they need and what works for them to feel supported to achieve their aspirations for a full life, surrounded by community and centred in cultural values.

Bonnie Dukakis, Executive Officer at KYC states, **"The Victorian Government's announcement today demonstrates a disingenuous care to our most vulnerable children, which brings to question the Government's credibility to truly listen to the continuous advocacy of our children, families and communities."**

Youth Crime rates remain at historic lows despite a post-covid rebound. According to ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) data, there were 8,175 youth offenders in Vic in 22-23, compared to 8,974 in the first year of the Andrews Government (14-15) and 14,743 in the last year of the Brumby Government (09-10).

KYC has been working with the Government on this reform for many years alongside our Elders and community. Ignoring the recommendations and stories of Aboriginal children, young people and community is not platforming the importance of self-determination or is a considered solution to our state's most vulnerable and fastest growing population. This decision will only lead to our children being further subjected to the racism, violence and trauma that has been inflicted upon our communities since colonisation.

"All Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria should be supported to heal and thrive — this is achieved through investment into Aboriginal-led initiatives in our communities. It is unclear what the point of difference is in the inclusion of additional powers to transfer young people to adult prison from existing powers available to the Youth Parole Board."

KYC's Ngaga-dji report sets out a vision that enables Aboriginal children to thrive and the path to making it happen. One of the key recommendations is raising the age of criminal responsibility, alongside solutions that support the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Ngaga-dji compiles the stories of first-hand accounts of young people who have been caught in the quicksand of the criminal legal system.

KYC strongly urges the Labor Government to keep their promise of raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 as soon as possible, and to 14 by 2027. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Victoria are not the

problem – the systems currently in place, and the Government decisions made in the past and present, impact their lives, their families, and will continue unless the Government takes action to ensure the future of our young mob is protected.

Spokesperson

Bonnie Dukakis, Executive Officer

Media Contact

Maya Hodge, Communications Officer
engagement@koorieyouth.org.au

Links

www.koorieyouthcouncil.org.au
<https://www.koorieyouthcouncil.org.au/blogs/>

About the Koorie Youth Council (KYC)

The Koorie Youth Council (KYC) is the representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Victoria. Guided by an Executive and our state-wide network, KYC values the diversity and strength of young people as decision-makers. KYC advocates to government and community to advance the rights and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.