



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

National DFSV Peak Body urges NT Government to collaborate with frontline services on Child Protection Reform

The Northern Territory (NT) Government must ensure that proposed amendments to the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 (NT)* uphold the rights and wellbeing of Aboriginal children by working closely with Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) who work at the frontline with families affected by domestic violence, according to the national peak body that represents the FVPLS sector.

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) is deeply concerned by the very limited consultation process surrounding the NT Government's proposed *Care and Protection of Children Amendment Bill 2025 (NT) (Bill)*, and its potential to erode the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which ensures that Aboriginal children in care remain connected to their family, culture, and community.

"Aboriginal children need more protections, not less," said Kerry Staines, CEO, FNAAFV. "Weakening these principles not only disregards the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the NT, but risks repeating past harms that have left deep scars on our communities. We consider that the amendments also go against the recommendations contained in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home Report*," Ms Staines said.

"FNAAFV calls on the NT Government to halt the proposed amendments until meaningful consultation is conducted with FVPLSs and Aboriginal Peak Organisations. Ensuring genuine collaboration will not only improve outcomes for Aboriginal children but will also demonstrate a commitment to the principles of self-determination and cultural safety," she said.

"A majority of child protection, out-of-home care, and court-decided cases concerning the wellbeing of children are directly linked to domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFS¹); and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are disproportionately affected by DFSV. FNAAFV stresses that working closely with NT FVPLSs can minimise the "upstream effect" of cases escalating to court by addressing issues early and providing timely, culturally safe interventions.

"FVPLSs have consistently demonstrated their capacity to provide place-based solutions that work. As the primary providers of culturally safe services for Aboriginal families in the NT, they are uniquely positioned to guide reforms that protect children and support families in ways that are culturally appropriate and effective."

"FNAAFV has strongly advocated for many years that state and territory governments implement automatic notification systems with direct referrals to FVPLSs when at-risk families are identified. This proactive approach ensures victim-survivors are connected with specialised services at the earliest stage, offering legal and non-legal support tailored to aid in families and to keep families together as a result of early intervention.

"Clear and automatic referral pathways are not just an administrative improvement—they are a life-saving measure. When victim-survivors have timely access to the culturally appropriate and expert support of FVPLSs, we see better outcomes in safety planning, legal advocacy, and access to essential services. FNAAFV urges and calls for all Governments to work collaboratively with FVPLSs to ensure these referral pathways are embedded in protocols and supported by adequate resources. (continues...)

¹ *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence* Policy and Practice Paper, Campo M, December 2015.



The NT Government must also collaborate with FVPLSs and other Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to:

- Strengthen support for Aboriginal families and communities to keep children safe within their kinship networks.
- Improve assessment processes for identifying Indigenous carers.
- Ensure that child protection reforms align with commitments under the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Safe and Supported National Framework for Protecting Children.

The Northern Territory's child protection system continues to face significant challenges, with 90% of children in out-of-home care being Aboriginal. Despite this, only 23.8% of these children are placed with family members.² FNAAFV stresses that any reforms must address these systemic shortcomings and uphold the principles of self-determination and cultural safety.

– ENDS –

For further information and media enquiries:

Lianne Brown, Senior Communications Officer - First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence

E. lbrown@fnaafv.org.au M. 0431 900 341

About First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV)

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV), formerly the National Family Violence Prevention & Legal Services Forum (NFVPLS Forum), was established in May 2012 and is the National Peak Body for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) around Australia that provide culturally safe and holistic services to First Nations people affected by family violence – predominantly women and children. FNAAFV provides expert national policy advice in areas of policy, planning and law reform, and advocates for safety and justice for First Nations people affected by family violence.

² *Family Matters Report 2024, SNAICC*