

MEDIA RELEASE

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NT curfew legislation will harm, not help, young people at risk: Jesuit Social Services

The passing of new laws that will make it easier for the Northern Territory’s police commissioner to impose snap curfews is a rushed decision that does not deal with the underlying factors behind anti-social behaviour, and will have a detrimental impact on marginalised young people,” says Jesuit Social Services.

“We were deeply concerned when the Northern Territory Government imposed a curfew on young people under the age of 18 in March: we warned that it risked further trouble and was more likely to do harm than good,” says John Adams, General Manager – Northern Territory at Jesuit Social Services.

“These new laws keep the door open for similarly rushed curfews in the future and are in direct conflict with the NT Anti-Discrimination Act by granting the power to impose curfews on particular age groups.

“Neither community services, justice or legal organisations have been consulted in relation to these new laws meaning the experience of young people impacted by these laws has not been heard or considered as part of the process.”

Mr Adams says the new laws don’t mandate consultation with community or First Nations leaders for a curfew to be implemented, and do not include provisions requiring the police commissioner and Government to consider alternative solutions first.

“Had we been consulted, we would have told the Territory Government that curfews are not in line with the evidence of what works in reducing anti-social behaviour.

“We would have urged the Government to instead focus on developing strategies to create stronger and more cohesive communities that are grounded in culture and based on the experience of experts, community sector organisations and First Nations leaders.

Jesuit Social Services delivers programs including Youth Justice Group Conferencing and Back on Track across parts of the Territory.

“We know the best way to respond to and support young people in trouble is by keeping them connected with education, culture and family, and supporting them to address the issues behind their behaviour. By committing to punitive responses such as curfews, we are getting further away from a system that gives young people a chance to flourish.

“We share the concerns of our sector peak body NTCOSS, who highlight the unprecedented concentration of power and few checks and balances introduced by these laws, and that they may result in bringing more people including young people into contact with police and the criminal justice system.”

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