

MEDIA RELEASE

15th June 2012**Safeguards and more consultation with Aboriginal leaders required before introduction of secure care for young people in Northern Territory**

Acting Jesuit Social Services CEO Sally Parnell welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Northern Territory draft Care and Protection of Children (Therapeutic Orders) Amendment Bill 2012 (see [Jesuit Social Services submission](#)). “We support the range of reforms being undertaken by the Northern Territory government in response to *Growing Them Strong, Together* - the report of the Board of Inquiry into the Territory’s Child Protection System,” Ms Parnell said. “In particular, we welcome investment in initiatives such as increased funding for out of home care, the provision of safe bed places in Alice Springs, and a commitment to building an Aboriginal Peak Body to work with Aboriginal child care agencies”.

Ms Parnell expressed concern, however, with certain aspects of the proposed Bill. “The wider continuum for therapeutic services and residential care that should sit around any secure care provisions has not been fully articulated,” Ms Parnell said. “This creates potential for ‘bracket creep’ in terms of who is to access the secure facility and why, especially in light of other safeguards that that we believe require strengthening in the proposed legislation.”

Such safeguards include access to legal representation and requirements for consultations when making decisions under the legislation, as well as tighter definition of the group of young people who will access secure care. “In other jurisdictions, legislative requirements around child protection investigations, review of cases, and placement into accommodation ensure that only the most at risk young people end up being placed in secure care,” Ms Parnell commented. “We are concerned about the lack of clarity regarding the pathways into secure care for young people who are not part of the child protection system.

“These concerns about potential for bracket creep and inadequate safeguards are even more troubling given the limited consultation with leaders in remote Aboriginal communities,” Ms Parnell further remarked. “The need for consultation and ownership of any residential care model that requires removal of children and young people from family and community is particularly sensitive for Aboriginal people given their long and traumatic history with state welfare and forced removal. Comprehensive consultation and consensus is a necessity not an option” Ms Parnell concluded.

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Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.