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Youth Justice: A step in the right direction

Law Society Northern Territory (“Society”) supports the government’s announcement to increase annual funding of the youth justice system, with a focus on increased services for diversion and bail support.

Society President Mr Tass Liveris said, “Northern Territory courts lock up more young people than anywhere else in Australia, which is extremely expensive and does nothing to reduce crime and re-offending. For many years the Society has said that rather than spending money on locking people up, government ought to invest in programs such as diversion, bail support, youth conferencing and rehabilitation. Early childhood intervention is critical and is proven to help steer young people away from the criminal justice system, which the entire community wants to see, rather than entrench them in it..”.

Although the community sometimes looks to the courts to solve the problem, there are heavy restraints the courts to reduce crime in the community. Mr Liveris said, “Courts can only deal with cases towards the end of the cycle and there are limits to what courts can do. That isn’t to say that courts don’t have a role to play, but we see time and time again that prevention is better than a cure. Breaking the cycle of crime and re-offending is a whole of community problem and we need to focus on the very start of the process, not just on courts at the end. The announcement by the government today recognises that fact and is a step in the right direction towards realising some changes over the long term.”.

The approach announced by the government is an important start, but it needs to develop and continue. It is also important to understand that these measures are about achieving generational change and that the decisions and actions made today aim to realise long-term benefits. Mr Liveris said, “Governments must continue to prioritise these types of services in budgets, as well as measures to address domestic and family violence, alcohol abuse and lack of opportunity in housing, employment and education, all of which regularly feature as issues in criminal behaviour. The investment in secure and sustainable legal services is also a critical part of the rounded solution.”.

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