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NSW ANTaR URGES GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON JUSTICE REINVESTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

NSW ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) has welcomed the release of the Strategic Review of Juvenile Justice and congratulated the Minister for Juvenile Justice, Graham West, for commissioning the report.

Although NSW ANTaR is encouraged by some elements of the NSW government's response to the report, ANTaR is disappointed the government has not made a definitive commitment to adopt the "Justice Reinvestment" approach recommended by the report.

NSW ANTaR President, Sally Fitzpatrick said NSW ANTaR believes the review points to a better way for juvenile justice in NSW. "It provides authoritative evidence that a reinvestment of funds from incarceration and institutions into long-term intensive community and family prevention and early intervention measures not only costs less, but is more effective in reducing re-offending" she said.

NSW ANTaR will urge the State and Federal governments to urgently fund the implementation of Justice Reinvestment under a national COAG initiative to reduce juvenile incarceration.

Justice reinvestment involves taking the \$500 per day which would be spent on the incarceration of a young person and spending it on building skills and resilience in families and communities. The review shows that this approach has worked in places where money has been directed to long-term intensive programs to support families and communities dealing with their kids rather than never ending increases in spending on police and institutions.

The younger an offender is incarcerated, the more likely it is they will be incarcerated again later. Alternatives to incarceration, such as police cautions or case conferencing lead to lower levels of re-offending. But re-offending is lowest when strategically targeted community based interventions are used to address risk factors.

"NSW ANTaR also believes the government must take steps to insulate juveniles committing non-serious offences from the law and order auction and mandatory 'tough on crime' policies, by ensuring that children-specific criteria override the inflexible and punitive provisions of bail and repeat offenders legislation" Ms Fitzpatrick said.

The review report points out that: *while get-tough approaches may be politically attractive, evidence indicates they are not effective.*

NSW ANTaR urges the government to encourage greater use of police cautions and to boost resources for legal aid, the Aboriginal Legal Services and case conferencing under the Young Offenders Act.

About half the juveniles who are incarcerated are on remand awaiting their day in court, sometimes because family circumstances will not allow them to meet their bail conditions. Many have been charged with offences which, even if they are eventually found guilty, do not carry a custodial penalty.

Almost half the juveniles detained in NSW are Indigenous. A young Aboriginal person apprehended by police in NSW is more than twice as likely as a non-Aboriginal to appear in court.

The report of the Juvenile Justice Policy Review and the NSW government's response is available at www.djj.nsw.gov.au.

NSW ANTaR is the pre-eminent advocacy body devoted exclusively to Indigenous social justice in NSW. For more information contact Bob White: 0410 080 434