



Mr Chris Steel MLA  
Treasurer  
ACT Legislative Assembly,  
Canberra  
Steel@act.gov.au

8 April 2025

Dear Minister Steel

I am writing to you on behalf of ANTaR ACT, a voluntary organisation in the ACT of mainly non-Indigenous people who support and advocate for First Nations rights and wellbeing. We maintain relationships with Aboriginal organisations in Canberra, including the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, and we educate and advocate on issues that matter to First Nations people here.

As we understand that this year's budget is going to be very tight, we want to emphasise the importance that we attach to the ACT Government maintaining, and indeed increasing, funding to First Nations community-controlled organisations in the ACT. This reflects priority reform 2 of the National Closing the Gap agreement, to which the ACT Government is a signatory. The services these organisations provide to First Nations people are culturally safe for them and much needed – noting that the ACT First Nations population is young and growing fast. These organisations have proven that they can deliver services to their people far more effectively than most mainstream departments. In particular there is a strong need for early intervention wrap-around programs to reduce the high rates of First Nations children in costly out of home care, as well as a need for specialist alcohol and other drug programs and mental health programs.

We also want to draw your attention to the value of investing in Justice Reinvestment and Throughcare programs that are codesigned with community to address the very high rates of First Nations people in youth detention and adult jail. Justice Reinvestment, and targeted Throughcare support for people transitioning from prison, are highly effective, evidence-based policies with proven positive results. See for example the evaluation of the ACT Extended Throughcare Pilot Program conducted by the University of NSW Social Policy Research Centre in 2017.

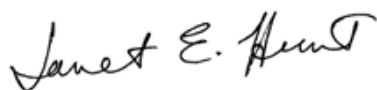
Six years ago in 2019, the ACT Government signed up to a goal of reducing the First Nations imprisonment rate by 15% by 2031, which is now only 6 years away – and this

year there has again been **no change**. In fact, First Nations youth detention has **increased**. The ACT Government also has a goal of reducing the very high rates of recidivism in the ACT but nine out of ten First Nations men are recidivist. This shows that jailing is failing. We need alternatives. Throughcare programs to support people in their transition from prison need to be properly funded and culturally appropriate. To date, early Justice Reinvestment initiatives in the ACT have proven success in reducing recidivism among the non-Indigenous population. While this is a worthy outcome in itself, much more needs to be done - and urgently - to improve outcomes for First Nations people in the ACT from Justice Reinvestment initiatives.

As I'm sure you know, the cost of accommodating just one prisoner in the ACT for one year is around \$200,000. Just keeping five of the approximately 100 First Nations people imprisoned at any time, out of jail would save one million dollars per year. This is possible. Yeddung Mura is running a program called I-Can for four serial recidivists and to date it has kept all of them out of the criminal justice system. This shows what can be done, for far less than a million dollars! Yeddung Mura has other programs such as throughcare, justice housing and bail support to reduce the number of people returning to jail. These programs are not very costly, yet effective, and if they are extended they can help reduce the number of First Nations people imprisoned in the ACT. This is both what the ACT electorate, who strongly supported the Voice Referendum, expect in a progressive jurisdiction like the ACT, and it is fiscally beneficial!

We urge you to ensure that all these programs continue in the next year and indeed in years to come. These are things the ACT Government has made commitments to achieve and needs to prioritise and protect for a most vulnerable segment of the ACT population. First Nations people have the answers to their problems if they are adequately resourced to implement them. That is the task of governments.

Warmest wishes



Janet Hunt on behalf of ANTAR ACT

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