



The Hon. Martin Pakula MP
Attorney-General
By email: martin.pakula@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Copied to:
The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
By email: daniel.andrews@minstaff.vic.gov.au

And The Hon. Jenny Mikakos
Minister for Children and Families and Youth Affairs
By email: jenny.mikakos@minstaff.vic.gov.au

26 April 2017

Dear Attorney-General

Home Stretch campaign for out-of-home care until 21

We write to you as an alliance of legal assistance providers in Victoria: Smart Justice for Young People and Victoria Legal Aid. Together we support the Home Stretch campaign to offer out-of-home care until age 21. Increasing the age would provide significant benefit not only for some of the most vulnerable young people in our community but also to the legal and justice sectors, and we urge you to support the increase.

Victorian youth justice advocacy coalition Smart Justice for Young People (SJ4YP) is the youth-specific arm of Smart Justice, led by the Federation of Community Legal Centres. SJ4YP brings together over 40 legal, youth, health, welfare and community organisations. Members include the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Law Institute of Victoria.

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) provides legal help to all Victorians, focusing on Victoria's most disadvantaged. Almost all children and young people who have legal representation for a child protection or youth crime legal matter in Victoria have that legal assistance arranged and/or directly provided by VLA.

Together, VLA and SJ4YP represent the most vulnerable people in our community, including children and young people.

We support the Home Stretch¹ campaign's evidenced-based case for extending young people's access to government-funded out-of-home care from 18 to 21 years because:

1. Housing, social and financial support for young people prevents entry to the justice system;
2. Home Stretch promotes targeted support for the cohort of children and young people who are at greatest risk of entering the justice system; and
3. It is cost effective to spend money on prevention.

¹ <http://thehomestretch.org.au/>

1. Reducing disadvantage prevents young people entering the justice system

As Victoria's primary legal assistance providers, we help young people engaged with the justice system and we help the adults those young people become. What we know from experience is backed by the evidence: reducing disadvantage reduces crime.² Victoria's most disadvantaged are also most likely to engage with the family and civil justice systems.³

2. Home Stretch promotes targeted support

There is significant evidence of a link between children and young people experiencing child abuse and neglect and later offending. In 2014-15, young people involved in the child protection system were 14 times more likely than the general population to be under youth justice supervision, and some 41% of young people subject to youth detention were also involved in child protection in the same year.⁴ Extending out-of-home-care to 21 would extend support to those young people who need it most.

3. Extended support would save the justice system money

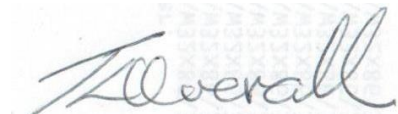
Analysis by Deloitte Access Economics has determined that each dollar invested in increasing the out-of-home-care leaving age would see a \$1.84 return.⁵ VLA analysis shows that children with child protection contact go on to become some of the most frequent users of legal aid services.⁶

VLA and SJ4YP support the Home Stretch proposal to offer care until age 21 because it is a sensible, compassionate proposal. The state as a parent should offer to its children who need it most the care that most other Victorian young people get from their parents.⁷ By doing so, Victoria can also expect to reduce costs to the justice system.

Representatives of SJ4YP and VLA would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further. Please contact us through Tiffany Overall: tiffany@youthlaw.asn.au or 03 9611 2439.

Yours sincerely


SMART JUSTICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



TIFFANY OVERALL

Advocacy and Human Rights Officer Youthlaw
Convenor of Smart Justice for Young People

VICTORIA LEGAL AID



BEVAN WARNER

Managing Director

² See SJ4YP's factsheet "More prisons are not the answer to reducing crime", available from http://www.smartjustice.org.au/cb_pages/more_prisons_are_not_the_answer_to_reducing_crime.php, particularly the section 'Reducing disadvantage reduces crime'.

³ See Victoria Legal Aid client profiles – high-contact users of legal aid services, June 2014, <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/research-and-analysis/client-profiles>

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Data Linkage Series No. 22: Young people in child protection and under youth justice supervision 2014–15
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129557321>.

⁵ Raising our children: Guiding young Victorians in care into adulthood, Socioeconomic cost benefit analysis by Deloitte Access Economics, April 2016, http://thehomestretch.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Raising-Our-Children_Guiding-Young-Victorians-in-Care-into-Adulthood.pdf. See also the Australian Institute of Family Services article: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2016/11/30/socioeconomic-case-extending-age-leaving-out-home-care>.

⁶ See Victoria Legal Aid client profiles – high-contact users of legal aid services, June 2014, <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/research-and-analysis/client-profiles>

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that in 2011, 88% of 15-19 years olds and 51% of 20-24 year olds lived with at least one parent, and predicted that trend would continue: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Household and Family Projections, Australia, 2011 to 2036 \(cat. no. 3236.0\)](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3236.0)