

Media release

More legislation, more harm—NAAJA expresses concerns over police and corrections legislation

The Northern Territory Government introduced two new bills to Parliament last week that will expand police powers and take steps towards privatising the prison system. Neither bill was made public prior to being introduced into Parliament. No consultation or scrutiny process has occurred for either bill.

The *Correctional Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* seeks to establish special correctional officers and special probation and parole officers, representing a shift towards the privatisation. These roles, which are uniquely appointed by the Corrections Commissioner, grant contractors with the same powers as public sector correctional officers and prison and parole officers, including the use physical force, restraints and weapons.

The onus is now on the contractor, not the government, to ensure that privately contracted personnel taking on corrections responsibilities will have the required training and certification prior to commencing in their roles. NAAJA is concerned that poorly trained and underqualified privately contracted staff will become responsible for prisoners in extremely challenging situations, which will create high risks for both the prisoners and staff. Furthermore, there will be limited options for legal recourse should something go wrong.

This Bill was passed in Parliament late on Thursday night last week and will take effect shortly.

‘Our lawyers have seen prison and watch house conditions deteriorate rapidly over the past few months. We need more accountability, not less’, said a NAAJA spokesperson.

Police will also be given new powers to make arrests and administer drug and alcohol tests. The *Police Administration Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* grants police explicit powers to enter private premises without a warrant to arrest individuals in breach of their parole or whose parole has been revoked. It also allows police to enter private property to administer alcohol or drug tests to individuals subject to a domestic violence order (DVO).

NAAJA welcomes the efforts of the Northern Territory Government to address the domestic violence epidemic in the NT. However, any expansion of police powers needs proper consultation, scrutiny and robust oversight. These expansions of powers always have a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal

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Territorians. Efforts to address domestic violence in the Northern Territory should align with recommendations from the Coroner in response to a recent coronial inquest into the deaths of four Aboriginal women, who passed away as a consequence of domestic violence.

These bills will only exacerbate the already buckling prison system in the Northern Territory, with over 2,700 people in prison.

These bills come at a time when 40 Aboriginal people are taken into custody every day across the Northern Territory. Expanding police powers and privatising correctional services will not reduce crime or improve community safety, it will only further harm Aboriginal Territorians.

Instead of cramming our watch houses with more and more prisoners at great cost to Territory taxpayers, the NT Government should be prioritising diversionary, rehabilitation and education programs as an alternative to incarceration, and reducing the remand times for people waiting for trial from the current time frame of 96 days.” said the NAAJA spokesperson.

Media contact

Comments in this media release other than direct quotes can be attributed to a NAAJA spokesperson.

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