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## **Urgent action required to ensure people in the Northern Territory can access vital legal help**

National Legal Aid is deeply concerned that Legal Aid NT has had to make the difficult decision to cut services due to inadequate funding. These cuts come at a time when demand for legal help is rising across the Northern Territory as a result of the Northern Territory Government's 'tough on crime' agenda.

From 17 November 2025 Legal Aid NT has been unable to provide new grants of legal aid in criminal matters for people who are not in custody. Legal Aid NT is continuing to provide grants of legal aid to young people who are not in custody, but only where in-house staff have capacity to provide that service.

Legal assistance is an essential public service and is fundamental to the right to a fair trial in the criminal justice system. The reforms introduced by the Northern Territory Government – including changes to bail laws and lowering the age of criminal responsibility - have increased the volume, complexity and urgency of criminal law matters, placing significant additional pressure on legal assistance providers who do not have sufficient funding to accommodate the rising need in the community.

“Reductions in Legal Aid NT’s criminal law capacity will have immediate and serious consequences for the most marginalised people in the Northern Territory. People facing charges will be left to navigate complex legal processes alone, including children. We are extremely concerned about the risk of profoundly unjust outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who are already disproportionately represented in the justice system.” NLA Chair Annmarie Lumsden said.

Access to independent legal representation is also critical for the efficient and effective operation of the criminal justice system more broadly – without this courts will experience further delays and the pressures on police, corrections and social services will continue to rise.

National Legal Aid urges all levels of government to work together to ensure sustainable, adequate and predictable funding for the Northern Territory’s legal assistance providers. Timely, high-quality legal help is essential to maintaining community safety, upholding the integrity of the justice system, and protecting the rights of those most at risk.

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