

# COMMUNITY IS EVERYTHING

## ENGAGING YOUR MP - JUNE 2018



### Tips for winning over your state or territory MP

Amnesty's Community is Everything campaign calls on state and territory governments to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous kids in prison by focusing on a positive approach that favours prevention over detention.

We need state and territory MPs to be champions of youth justice in their state or territory and push Premiers and Chief Ministers and Attorney Generals to raise the age a child can be locked up to at least 14 and to support Indigenous-led alternatives to prison for all kids, including those who would be removed from prison between the ages of 10-13.

### Why are we focusing on state and territory MPs?

Last year we tried our hardest to get the Federal Government to step up and take a leadership role to reform the youth justice system. Unfortunately that didn't work, so we're going to adjust our approach and focus on getting the changes state by state.

State and territory governments are responsible for their own law and justice policies so it is up to them to set the age a child can be held criminally responsible and imprisoned. When it comes to funding Indigenous-led alternatives to prison for kids, state and territory governments have a better sense of what's happening on the ground and can champion these programs.

### What should I ask my state or territory MP to do?

- Ask your state or territory MP what their position on this issue is and record it.
- Ask them to support the issue by making a public statement or by taking a photo with you and your group at your meeting with them.
- Ask them to take it to the party room to discuss with their party.
- Ask them to write to or call their state Attorney General and Premier and ask them to lead on this issue.

#### Remember:

State MPs are different from federal MPs. If you don't already know, you'll need to find out which state electorate you're in and who your elected representative is. You should be able to do this easily by searching online.

## MP engagement

There are lots of ways you can engage with your MP. Remember they are elected to represent you so they are interested in what you think. MP's will act if they feel pressure from their constituents and if they are armed with solutions that work.

### Research your state or territory MP

- Search online to find out who your state MP is. Look on their website, Google them, subscribe to their newsletter to find out where they and their party sit on this issue.

### Write a letter or call your state or territory MP

Politicians get a lot of letters from organisations wanting their attention and asking them to do something but they really want to hear from their local voters.

- Always make it clear you're a member of their electorate.
- Make sure it is personal and in your words. Clearly show you are representing the local Amnesty group.
- Ask your organiser how many Amnesty supporters live in their electorate so you can include the number. Pollies ears will prick up when they hear this because each person is a vote.
- Tell them how you / your groups feels about the human rights rights issue.
- Be polite, short and concise!
- Ask for action and a response.

### Meet with your state or territory MP

- Organise a meeting with your state MP (see different examples below)
- Talk them through the need and importance of raising the age and investing in Indigenous-led diversion programs.
- Tell your MP how many petition signatures you've collected
- Take your Indigenous partners to demonstrate community support for the campaign.
- Provide them with the information on what you're asking for and a clear directive of what you want from them to do - i.e. agree to support the campaign and commit to discuss it with their party. Check the [Activist Resources page](#) for briefing documents for MPs or ask your Community Organiser.
- Follow up with your MP - hold them to account. If they agreed to speak to their party about the issue, ask them to report back, you can do this with phone calls and emails.
- If you don't feel confident engaging with your MP - complete the MP engagement training [here](#) online. If you feel you need more training or support, contact your organiser.

## Closed forum with your MP

For activists and groups who already have a relationship with both their local Indigenous community and state or territory MP, a closed forum is great way to deepen the discussion about the overrepresentation of Indigenous kids in prison and put more pressure on your local MP. It's an opportunity for your group together in solidarity with an Indigenous leader/local community member to voice opinions and concerns, as well as solutions in order to gain a solid commitment from your state or territory MP to raise these concerns with their respective party.

Running a successful closed forum takes time to organise, consider the following:

- Develop a plan in terms of how you are going to organise and run the forum, including the aim and objectives, potential costs involved, location and tasks that need to be accomplished.
- Invite a member(s) of your local Indigenous community to your group's first planning meeting and consult with them about being a part of the forum and how they would like to be involved.
- If possible find a safe environment such as an Indigenous cultural centre or sports club to hold the forum. This will help to ensure those Indigenous people attending feel comfortable.
- Think about local community experts you could ask to participate in the forum. Along with Indigenous leaders you might also like to invite a local doctor, school principal, coach and a kids sports club. The breadth of support you can demonstrate will help to get your MP's support.
- Create an agenda for the forum giving each representative a space to talk to make the best use of time, allowing space for the MP and their staff to ask questions.
- At the forum provide your state or territory MP with the information on what you're asking and a clear directive of what you want them to do - pledge their support for the campaign and commit to discuss it with their party.
- Follow up with your MP - hold them to account. If they agreed to speak to their party about the issue, ask them to report back.



#### Tip:

It's a good idea to plan out your meeting before you go in, that way you can make sure you have a plan to fit in all the things you want to say in the time allocated - often it's only 20 mins!

## What if my MP won't meet with me or isn't supportive?

We have some exciting ideas about some things we can do to put pressure on if your MP doesn't want to engage with your group and the issue. Reach out to your organiser and we can help you figure out the best approach based on who the MP is and what's happening in your state or territory.

### Let us know how you went!

Hearing about your meetings with MPs not only shows us all your great work, it helps inform Amnesty's meetings with state and territory MPs. Please take time to fill in the [MP engagement form](#).



**FOR MORE TRAINING AND INFO ON HOW TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR MP, CHECK OUR [MP ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES](#).**

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### PHIL ARMIT FROM THE TOOWOOMBA GROUP AND AINOA CABADA FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH MP ENGAGEMENT:

“Let's be real, meeting with an MP is scary. But it is also an excellent opportunity to make a huge change in your community. A successful meeting with an MP helps us build the community pressure that we need to keep kids in their communities. As activists, the real change starts with us.” -- Ainoa Cabada, Indigenous Rights activist, South Australia

"Our first steps into the CIE campaign was to seek permission to advocate on behalf of local Indigenous people. As a starting point, we spent about 12 months getting to know local Indigenous professionals. We attended network meetings and met with individuals to hear about programs in education, health, justice, family support, employment, other matters. We worked slowly towards a meeting with our local federal member. What we'd learned from our interactions shaped the form and authenticated the substance of that meeting. It was a meeting of equals, everyone respectful. The MP heard Indigenous voices explain how their efforts were supporting families and kids at risk. The message was clear: these are the sorts of programs that government should be seeking out; these are the people government should be consulting in the hunt for a solution to disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous kids." - Phil Armit, AIA Toowoomba Group

Visit [www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au) for more resources

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land

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