

Stephen Smith MP
House of Representatives
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Smith,

I am concerned that the children in immigration detention centres are at risk of harm. I am writing to let you know that I have written to Minister Vanstone about this concern and that I support your efforts to find alternatives to mandatory detention of asylum seekers.

Health and teaching professionals working with children in NSW, are obliged under Section 27 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, to report to the Department of Community Services any child in their care who is at risk of harm. Failure to comply with mandatory reporting requirements is an offence. The maximum penalty for this is currently \$22,000.

Under Section 23 of the act, a child or young person is considered at risk if their basic physical and psychological needs are not being met. By these criteria all children in immigration detention centres are at risk of harm.

I am concerned that these children are at risk because of the following reasons:

- 1) These children and young people have not committed a crime but are mandatorily confined in a detention centre.
- 2) They live behind razor wire and have no freedom of movement.
- 3) They are not provided with independent legal advice, counsel or representation.
- 4) They are supervised by guards trained in corrective management.
- 5) They do not have a release date.
- 6) They have no direct access to early childhood services, paediatric, medical or psychiatric care.
- 7) They live in a punitive climate of repression and fear.
- 8) They are exposed to seeing acts of violence and self-harm including suicide attempts. 9) They are at risk of physical, sexual and psychological abuse.
- 10) They are deprived of choosing friends and interacting with their peers.
- 11) They do not have access to a full public education.

The impact on the children has devastating and far-reaching effects causing psychological trauma that is likely to persist into adulthood.

It is difficult for families in the detention centre to have appropriate interaction, and for children to receive appropriate encouragement, nurturing or stimulation.

These children and young people are socially isolated

The children's confidence and self-esteem are being damaged. At every age their emotional, behavioural and social development is being adversely affected with some young people expressing feelings of despair and suicidal intent.

The children in Villawood have been reported to DOCS as per Section 24 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 which states that a person may report concerns about risk of harm relating to a class of children or young persons. A 'class of children' being a group of children or young people who may be at risk of harm from abuse because of a person or situation.

I understand that DOCS has recommended that children be released from Villawood immigration detention centre and that DIMIA is not allowing their release.

Many citizens are concerned that our federal government policy of mandatory detention of child asylum seekers is causing harm to children and that DIMIA is not following recommendations by our child protection agency.

Thank you for opposing this policy.

Yours sincerely,