

# FIRST PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY OF VICTORIA

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes  
The Hon. Enver Erdogan  
The Hon. Gabrielle Williams  
**Attorney-General and Ministers**  
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country  
Level 26, 121 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Date 8/12/22

## Raise the age

To the Hon. Jaclyn Symes, The Hon. Enver Erdogan, and the Hon. Gabrielle Williams,

I write to you as the elected Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria – the democratic voice for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the journey to Treaty.

Thank you once again for your steadfast commitment to walking alongside us as we find ways to ensure First Peoples will always be able to make the decisions that affect our communities, our culture and our Country.

I look forward to continuing our productive working relationships for the remainder of this Assembly term, and whether I'm looking on as a spectator or a participant – following our own Assembly elections, I'm of course excited that Treaty negotiations might formally commence later next year.

As you know, Treaty presents us all with an opportunity to deliver significant structural reforms that will improve the lives of my people and also make Victoria a fairer place with a deeper connection to the oldest living culture in the world.

Some reforms will take time and might evolve over time, but some reform can and should happen now. There are some matters so urgent, so unacceptable, and for which we already have clear solutions to.

The most obvious that comes to mind is the need for the Victorian Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years of age to at least 14 years.

This is a reform that should not, and does not need to, wait for the formal Treaty negotiations. It is a simple change that would make the world of difference.

This time last year, Marcus and I wrote to the Attorney General and urged the Government to stop locking up our children.

Nothing has changed. We are both bitterly disappointed by this fact. We don't want another year to go by with more of our children getting caught in the quicksand of the criminal justice system. We need reform, yesterday.

If there is anything the Assembly can do to help build cross party support for this important reform, please let me know.

I understand the age of criminal responsibility will also be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General.

I urge you to listen to First Peoples. Listen to the evidence and the advice of experts. Listen to your own conscience, which surely must tell you that children do not belong in prisons. And act now. Act here in Victoria and push your interstate counterparts to follow suit.

I will be raising this issue and other related justice issues next week when I present to the Yoorrook Justice Commission on behalf of the Assembly and will be pleased to provide you with the Assembly's written submission.

I will be adding our collective voice to the brave and heartbreaking testimonies, the reports and overwhelming evidence being heard at the commission's public hearings shining a light on Victoria's so-called justice system.

I urge you to pay close attention to the many solutions that have and will continue to come to light as part of the current hearings at Yoorrook.

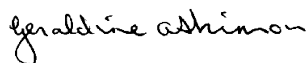
Don't wait for Treaty to improve the lives of First Peoples in Victoria.

Children need love and a helping hand, not to be thrown into concrete cells.

Without our children, Treaty will be for nothing.

Raise the age to at least 14.

Yours sincerely and in hope,



**Aunty Geraldine Atkinson,**

Co-Chair, First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria