Open Letter on Proposed Social Housing Changes

11 November 2026

The Hon Steve Edgington MLA
Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development
Parliament House
Darwin NT 0800
By email: Minister.Edgington@nt.gov.au

Dear Minister,

We write as a coalition of Northern Territory legal services, community services and land councils to oppose the Northern Territory Government's proposed social housing changes.

Together, we represent and provide support and assistance to social housing tenants across the Northern Territory. We have serious concerns about the changes proposed to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999* (NT) through the recently released Consultation Paper: "Addressing anti-social behaviour in social housing."

The term "anti-social behaviour" is deeply concerning. The conduct that is labelled "anti-social behaviour" is most often the product of domestic and family violence, lack of appropriate treatment and support for the 43% of tenants living with mental illness, experiences of crime, overcrowding and poverty.

As 87.2% of Northern Territory social housing tenants are Aboriginal people, and the changes would apply only to social housing tenants, the impact of the proposed changes would fall overwhelmingly on Aboriginal people. All too often, we see cultural differences unfairly labelled as anti-social behaviour. We see too many complaints made simply because someone does not want to have Aboriginal neighbours. The proposed changes will embed and exacerbate these problematic attitudes, rather than build respect and cohesion.

The services needed to address these issues are chronically underfunded and operating beyond capacity. Tenants cannot manufacture additional service capacity into existence, even under threat of imminent eviction. The proposed reforms will punish people for their circumstances and push the most vulnerable people and families into homelessness.

Evicting a family does not address domestic violence, overcrowding or poverty. It removes the family's home and moves the problematic behaviour elsewhere, usually into homelessness, another crowded house or the NT's overstretched health system.

In a jurisdiction with the highest rate of homelessness in the country, the Northern Territory Government cannot afford to push more vulnerable people on to the street. This will not increase community safety. More people without a home will mean more people in crisis in our parks, streets and public spaces, and more pressure on police, hospitals and the justice system.

These proposed changes are the latest step in an escalating attack on social housing tenants, who are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. They follow a series of steps to erode the rights of social housing tenants, including removing tenants' rights to be heard on rent determinations and closing YiSSA, the 400-bed short-stay facility in Darwin, relocating tenants 100km away from essential medical and social services.

The mark of a strong government is one which governs with compassion and care for all Territorians, not division and fear.

We urge the Northern Territory Government to abandon these short-sighted proposed changes and to work with the community services sector and social housing tenants to develop an effective, evidence-backed and adequately resourced approach to sustaining social housing tenancies, or risk repeating the mistakes of successive governments before it. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this.

Yours sincerely,

Alice de Brenni
A/Chief Executive Officer
Central Australian Women's Legal Service Inc (CAWLS)

Warren Williams
Chair
Central Land Council

Rachael Bowker
Chief Executive Officer
Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS)

Hannah George
Chief Executive Officer
Katherine Women's Information and Legal Service (KWILS)

Clara Mills
Principal Legal Officer
North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (NAAFLS)

Ben Grimes
Chief Executive Officer
North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA)

Yuseph Deen
Chief Executive Officer
Northern Land Council

Trish Connolly
Chief Executive Officer
Northern Territory Council of Social Services (NTCOSS)

Caitlin Weatherby-Fell
Chief Executive Officer
Top End Women's Legal Service (TEWLS)