



MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Reference: C15/52277

Mr Nathan Kennedy
President
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
PO Box A147
SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1235

Dear Mr Kennedy

Thank you for your letter of 30 May 2015 about the importance of continued funding for the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) to operate its custody notification service.

I share your concern about Indigenous deaths in custody and am committed to supporting initiatives that reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming into police and prison custody in the first place. I am pleased to say that the Commonwealth Government, through the Attorney-General's Department, will provide \$263,000 to the NSW/ACT Aboriginal Legal Service to support the custody notification service this year.

Given the NSW Government is responsible for the criminal justice system, I am also working closely with them to ensure the custody notification service continues to provide important support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people taken into custody.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less likely than non-Indigenous people to die in custody, I remain concerned that Indigenous people are much more likely than non-Indigenous people to be taken into custody. So long as this continues, it will take a concerted effort to sustain the downward trend in Indigenous deaths in custody that we have witnessed over the last decade.

This Government is therefore focused on addressing the underlying conditions that bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into contact with the criminal justice system. Our focus is on tackling the disadvantage experienced by many people, including poor educational attainment, unemployment, alcohol and other substance misuse and childhood abuse and neglect. Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Australian Government is investing around \$250 million for Safety and Wellbeing activities in 2015-16 that seek to improve drug, alcohol and substance misuse treatment and prevention, reduce offending, violence and victimisation in Indigenous communities, and improve health and social and emotional wellbeing.

Thank you again for writing to me on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Scullion', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

NIGEL SCULLION

16 / 7 / 2015