Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir,

Kids belong in classrooms, not courtrooms.

A series of media reports regarding the incarceration rates of Indigenous youth shows the appalling rate of young people who are entering, and being trapped in, the justice system. As a nation, I believe we need to take action.

Like many Australians, I believe that ***diversionary programs focussing on education and employment are crucial to reversing the statistics***. Through a Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC) a holistic approach can be used to ensure our young Indigenous youth don't enter the criminal justice system. The VTEC model works for Indigenous people who have been long term unemployed – we ***can*** replicate this for Indigenous youth who are at risk of falling through the cracks.

***The facts are*:**

- On an average day in 2011-12 Indigenous youth were 31 times as likely to be in juvenile detention as non-Indigenous youth.
- Aboriginal people are returned to prison at a higher rate than they are retained in either high school or university.
- 35.9 per cent of the Indigenous population is under the age of 15 – the time for action is now.
- 90 per cent of young Indigenous people that appear before the Children's Court go on to appear before the adult criminal court. Young Indigenous offenders are repeat offenders; small crimes turn into big crimes and the whole community loses. We can change that.

There are huge disparities in employment, participation and economic outcomes for Indigenous people in Australia. Criminal records are a major barrier to many Indigenous people finding work. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse clearly identifies that criminal history adds a layer of complexity to employment in addition to the socioeconomic disadvantage Indigenous ex-offenders experience.

Please note my concerns and consider any method by which the abovementioned VTEC model may be implemented to address the issue of our Indigenous youth incarceration rate and thereby act to decrease the ongoing damage being caused not only to the young lives involved but also to our collective culture and society as a whole.

I would most sincerely appreciate any feedback/comment anyone may have regarding this critical issue.

Yours sincerely,

Warren Redding