

Don't forget the children

Statement with End Child Imprisonment campaign partners

10 September 2026

As a result of the adult prison capacity crisis and recent [decisions](#) around changes to the early release schemes introduced by the Sentencing Act 2026, the Government has [confirmed](#) the need for urgent changes to the prison estate.

It is deeply concerning that children appear to have been left out of public discussions, even though they are likely to be adversely impacted. This may place us in breach of our domestic and international legal obligations including the duty to promote the welfare of children and ensure that, where it is absolutely necessary for children to be detained, they spend the shortest appropriate time in detention.

The End Child Imprisonment campaign [\[1\]](#) welcomes the government's [goal](#) to "transform" custody for children by moving away from Young Offender Institutions, but urgent action is needed to turn this commitment into reality. We are calling on the Government to use this opportunity to actively consider the rights, needs and best interests of children in the criminal justice system as part of its wider considerations. The Government must prioritise children and honour long-standing commitments to reduce the detention of children in any form and end the use of prison [\[2\]](#) for children.

The Government must now:

1. Deliver the promise to close prisons for children. The small number of children who do need to be deprived of their liberty should be kept in suitable, small, local and non-prison service accommodation. [\[3\]](#) The upcoming Youth Custody Transformation Plan must set out time-bound steps to achieve this.
2. Bring forward legislation on an expedited basis to ensure that children are spending shorter periods of time in detention than adults. Changes to the early release schemes mean that some children will now spend longer in prison than adults serving the same length of sentence. This is unacceptable and only arises due to changes introduced to reduce pressure on the adult prison estate.
3. Be ambitious in tackling the overuse of remand for children. This is a long-standing area of focus given nearly two-thirds of children held on remand do not go on to receive a custodial sentence. Yet 40% of children in custody are unsentenced. Recent pilots show that if enough thought, effort and attention is put into reducing remand, it can be done. They should be sustained and mirrored throughout the nation, with devolved funding used to provide tailored local authority support to children who are currently remanded or at risk of remand, keeping them and the public safe while awaiting trial and sentence.

We are happy to discuss these proposals and how they could be taken forward.

Notes

[1] [End Child Imprisonment](#) is run by Article 39, Alliance for Youth Justice, the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, Child Rights International Network (CRIN), Howard League for Penal Reform, INQUEST, Just for Kids Law, the National Association for Youth Justice and several leading children's rights and child justice campaigners.

[2] In its 2020 publication [The Case for Ending Child Imprisonment](#), the End Child Imprisonment campaign offered six 'child prison' tests, including that the institution is governed by prison law. Based on these tests, we refer to young offender institutions and secure training centres as child prisons.

[3] For more information on this model for restriction of liberty see End Child Imprisonment's 2019 publication [Principles and minimum expectations for children deprived of their liberty](#)

End Child Imprisonment is a broad-based campaign. Not all supporters will necessarily agree with all of the contents of this statement