Supplementary Questions to the Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

What measures would improve the transparency of funding to service providers in regional communities? What benefits do you think this would generate in addressing youth crime?

Youth crime is symptomatic of broader socio-economic challenges, and effectively addressing it will require a holistic, community-focused and place-based approach. Such an approach has potential long-term, community-wide benefits because it offers tailored solutions to local challenges and needs. Transparency of funding and regular reporting will ensure accountability in service delivery and build trust with communities, as they can see the impact of this funding in the community.

Just Reinvest NSW has several suggestions for improving the transparency of funding for service providers:

Utilising regional crime and justice data

Incorporating a range of data sources into funding decisions will help minimise wastage and ensure resources are going directly to those communities with the most concerning crime rates.

Crime and justice data will demonstrate which communities have the greatest need for funding, and using this in decision-making offers a level of transparency and a rationale for funding decisions. Using key metrics to allocate funding resources (e.g. youth crime rates, car theft, burglary) will provide support and create much-needed programs in the communities with the greatest need. For example, BOCSAR data could be used to demonstrate the LGAs with the highest increase in youth crime, and funding can be directed to service providers in that region who specifically work with young people.

Further, this can be compounded with local level service mapping, which would demonstrate the available services in the region and the programs offered in key areas (e.g. Homelessness services, domestic violence prevention, legal support etc.). This would enable the government to see which services best target the main areas of concern and allocate funding accordingly. For example, funding could be concentrated on organisations that provide support and counselling on several related issues to better address concerns around community safety e.g. A charity (or combination of charities) that provides mental health support, domestic violence counselling and programs for drug/alcohol/gambling addiction is well placed to address these factors affecting the home life which are a driver of youth crime.

By aligning funding decisions with the highest priority metrics, this can help to ensure resources are going towards the areas with the worst performance. When communities and local service providers have more resources, they will be better equipped to resource intervention and prevention programs that address these metrics of concern.

Seeking community input and feedback

Community consultation also builds communication and trust between residents, government and service providers, engaging all stakeholders to ensure solutions are relevant and likely to be accepted and implemented in community.

Inviting community input into the funding process will help provide a better understanding of community needs and how they want funds to be allocated in their LGA. This can be undertaken through community surveys, interviews, and town halls, as well as at local service providers to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute their views. These sessions could also be undertaken at schools, sport events, after-school programs to ensure the views of young people are included too, as they will be a key audience targeted by service providers. Community profile data can also be used to better understand local demographics, and add additional context to the available crime data and community feedback.

Tailoring interventions to the community needs and priorities ensures minimal wastage by directly addressing the root causes of offending as identified by the community. This can also help direct resources to 'upstream' programs that address the drivers of crime, not merely funding increased policing and other interventions that are required after a crime has been committed. For example, one LGA may not have any after-school programs, and call for these to be funded, while another LGA may find their existing after-school programs are so successful they need to be extended to later, to keep kids engaged for longer.

Regular reporting and reviews

Reporting can be resource-intensive but is an important step in ensuring the funding process is transparent and accountable. Funding should be delivered with clear conditions and targets, with regular reporting requirements and deadlines established upfront. In the event targets are not being met, regular reporting deadlines offer service providers the opportunity to provide context to their results and potentially suggest changes to reach these goals.

These results can also be viewed alongside crime data to determine the impact and provide context as needed. It would also be beneficial to have this information publicly available (at least for the local community) so government and organisations can be

held accountable, and so residents can be reassured funding is being used appropriately. Real-time reporting will be challenging to share but monthly or bi-monthly reporting could be beneficial.

<u>Community safety assessments</u>

Regular (e.g. annual or half-yearly) place-based assessments will help determine if services are having an impact on community safety, and identify any gaps that still need to be addressed. Inputs to this process could include community consultation, surveys, interviews and other forms of feedback from local residents, law enforcement and service providers. For example, community surveys could show young people are feeling bored on the weekends due to a lack of activities and services, which is contributing to an increase in youth crime.

Your submission states that Aboriginal students do not feel safe in school, and the learning environment and curriculum does not meet their needs (p9). Could you provide more detail on this, and do you have any suggestions for how these issues could be addressed?

Aboriginal students in Australia often face significant challenges within the school system, including feeling unsafe in the learning environment and experiencing curricula that do not meet their cultural and educational needs. These issues are deeply rooted in historical and systemic inequities and continue to affect the educational outcomes and well-being of Aboriginal students.

<u>Safety concerns in schools</u>

Many Aboriginal students report feeling unsafe in school environments due to bullying, discrimination, and a lack of cultural understanding among their peers and teachers. These experiences of racism and marginalisation can severely impact students' mental health and sense of belonging.

The cultural disconnect between Aboriginal students and the predominantly non-Indigenous staff and students can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation. For example, a study by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2019) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were more likely to experience bullying, exclusion, and prejudice in school compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

When students do not feel safe, their ability to engage in learning is compromised, and this can lead to higher rates of absenteeism, disengagement, and even dropping out.

Curriculum gaps

The Australian education system has historically been slow to integrate Aboriginal culture, history, and worldviews into the mainstream curriculum. As a result, Aboriginal students often find that their experiences, values, and knowledge are not reflected in what they are taught. This lack of cultural relevance makes it difficult for Aboriginal students to connect with the material and feel valued within the educational system. A curriculum that does not recognise the diverse experiences of Aboriginal communities can lead to a lack of representation, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing feelings of invisibility.

Moreover, the curriculum's emphasis on Western perspectives may not align with the ways in which many Aboriginal students learn and engage with the world. Indigenous knowledge systems, storytelling, and kinship structures, which are integral to Aboriginal cultures, are often excluded or marginalised in standard teaching practices. As a result, Aboriginal students may struggle with engagement, motivation, and success in a system that fails to consider their cultural contexts.

Addressing the issues

To create a safe and supportive learning environment for Aboriginal students, schools must foster a culture of inclusion, respect, and cultural understanding. This can be achieved by providing professional development for teachers on Indigenous cultural competence and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. Schools must also implement anti-racism programs, ensure the presence of Indigenous role models, and create safe spaces where Aboriginal students feel empowered to share their experiences.

Additionally, the curriculum needs to be more culturally relevant, reflecting the rich history, contributions, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples. This involves including Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices within the teaching content, allowing Aboriginal students to see themselves in what they are learning. Tailoring education to meet the needs of Aboriginal students not only benefits them but also enriches the education system for all students by fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect.

Ensuring that Aboriginal students feel safe and supported in their learning environment is essential for their academic success and well-being. Addressing the lack of cultural relevance in the curriculum and providing a safer, more inclusive educational experience will help create a more equitable and effective system. By acknowledging and respecting the needs of Aboriginal students, the education system can contribute to closing the achievement gap and promoting a more inclusive and just society for all.