

OPINION

Reform of bail law vital for juvenile justice

More than a third of young people in contact with the juvenile justice system have spent time in foster or kinship care ("Juvenile detainees' shocking histories", April 12). We welcome the article's spotlight on the failures of a system that deepens disadvantage for already vulnerable children and young people.

There is ample research showing that when children spend time in juvenile justice centres they are more likely to reoffend and begin a cycle of criminal behaviour.

When they spend time on remand they are cut off from their communities, which has a number of damaging effects.

Resources need to be directed towards supporting children and

young people in their communities, not removing them. As the Attorney-General, Greg Smith, said this week, keeping young people out of juvenile justice centres needs to be a top priority.

At present, too many children and young people who will not be required to serve a custodial sentence remain in detention because they have been unable to secure bail as a result of section 22a of the Bail Act, which prevents them from applying for bail more than once.

Children and young people who are disadvantaged are more likely to be refused bail because of their circumstances, including not having access to stable accommodation or community support during court proceedings.

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families' extensive work in this area shows that children and young people must be exempted from section 22a, which will have the immediate effect of reducing the number of children and young people held on remand by giving them the opportunity to reapply for bail.

A first step is the NSW government's recent commitment to review the Bail Act.

Redirecting resources to community programs will also reduce the number of children and young people on remand and increase their opportunities to live a full and productive life.

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