Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.

February 4th, 2016

The Honourable M. Turnbull MP
Prime Minister of Australia
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

We the undersigned write this letter in light of Wednesday's High Court ruling.

As representatives of the child and family welfare sector, we are deeply concerned that the Australian Government continues to lock children up indefinitely in detention – particularly given the overwhelming expert evidence pointing to the life-long psychological harm detention inflicts on children, as well as the significant risk it poses to their physical health and safety.

We call on your Government to release all children and their families into the Australian community so they can live safely and in good health while their claims for protection are considered.

As a first step, the Government should immediately halt the transfer of Australian-born babies and their families to detention on Nauru, given the well-documented substandard conditions there that are unsuitable for adults, let alone babies and small children.

Australia is the only country in the world that mandates the indefinite detention of children seeking asylum.

This policy puts us in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory.

All children have the right to grow up in a safe, healthy environment and to reach their full potential. Children locked up in detention are being denied these most basic human rights at the hands of the Australian Government.

You have the power to remove children from detention now and ensure that no child is put in detention in the future.

As a matter of urgency, we call on the Government to:

- Release all children, along with their families, into the Australian community where they can live freely, attend school, make friends and grow and develop in a safe, healthy, nurturing environment;
- Legislate to prevent children being detained ever again (seven days is the maximum amount of time a child should be kept in detention, to allow for health and safety checks); and
- Appoint an independent guardian for children seeking asylum, to ensure their best interests are upheld.

Yours Sincerely,

Deb Tsorbaris
Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare

cc:
The Honourable Peter Dutton MP
Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
peter.dutton.mp@aph.gov.au

On behalf of:

Anchor Inc.
Andrew Jackomos Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People (Vic)
Anglicare Victoria
Australian Childhood Foundation
Australian Childhood Trauma Group
Barwon Child Youth and Families
Baptcare
Berry Street
Bethany Community Support
Brophy Family & Youth Services
Brotherhood of St Laurence
Cara Inc
Caroline Chisholm Society
Professor Cathy Humphreys
CatholicCare Melbourne and Gippsland
CatholicCare Sandhurst
Catholic Social Services Victoria
Child & Family Services Ballarat Inc.
Children's Protection Society
Cohealth
Connections UnitingCare
Council to Homeless Persons
Crossroads Network, The Salvation Army
Doncare
EACH Social & Community Health
Early Learning Association Australia
E.W. Tipping Foundation
FamilyCare
Foster Care Association of Victoria
Gateway Health
Gippsland Lakes Community Health
Greg Levine former Magistrate Children's Court of Victoria
International Social Service Australia
Jesuit Social Services
Jewish Care Victoria
Key Assets
Life Without Barriers
LifeWorks Relationship Counselling and Education Services
MacKillop Family Services
Mallee Family Care
MOIRA Disability and Youth Services
Odyssey House Victoria
OzChild
Permanent Care and Adoptive Families
Quantum Support Services Inc
Queen Elizabeth Centre
The Salvation Army Westcare
UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania
UnitingCare Werribee Support & Housing
Upper Murray Family Care
VANISH Inc.
VICSEG New Futures
Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association
Wesley Mission Victoria
Windermere
WISHIN
Youth Affairs Council of Vic