

Hon Jacinta Allan MP – Premier of Victoria

Thursday, 13 November 2025

LIFE SENTENCE FOR YOUTH GANG RECRUITERS

If you introduce children to a life of violent gang crime, you are evil. You aren't just endangering our community and hurting innocent victims in their homes and on the street – you're also committing child abuse.

Under our plan, you'll face a life sentence in jail.

Premier Jacinta Allan joined Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny today to announce that the Allan Labor Government will significantly increase the maximum penalty for recruiting a child to engage in a violent offence.

The maximum penalty for this crime is currently ten years.

As part of the change, the penalty will increase to 15 years across the board, with a new aggravated offence applying a maximum life sentence for adults who recruit a child to serious and violent offending such as aggravated home invasions or aggravated carjacking.

The penalty for this crime must be so severe because the harm it is causing in the community is so serious.

Organised crime luring children into violence has changed everything

If there's one big change to violent crime trends in Australia, it's organised crime recruiting children to do their dirty work. It's driving so much of the brazen, shocking, violent offending that children are committing on the streets and in people's homes.

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) was clear in its recent *Opening The Books* report:

- "Minors are increasingly being recruited" by serious organised crime gangs for acts of extreme violence
- It's "regularly seen in Australia" and is part of "a growing international trend"
- Technology is the "force multiplier", including 3D printed weapons, encrypted communication and more points of access online including social media
- The groups range from "traditional 'mafia'-style organisations and outlaw motorcycle gangs to unstructured groups and disparate transnational actors"
- Their business model is "crime-as-a-service" – Airtasker-style schemes to "outsource their dirty work" to youths who are "hired to carry out violent acts in public"
- They target children because of their "unique value" – they are "cheaper to hire...more easily influenced...and impressionable online"
- Some of these children even go on to become "future serious and organised crime threats" themselves

Victoria Police under the leadership of Chief Commissioner Mike Bush has also been outspoken on this unique threat, and our police act every day to disrupt organised crime activity in all its forms.

But more needs to be done – and we need a collective approach

Not enough people have been found and charged for this offence in the first place. The ACIC spell out exactly why. These evil puppet-masters are invisible. They're "tech-savvy" masterminds who are "harder to track than ever".

Police have worked tirelessly, but only 32 instances of the recruitment offence have been recorded in Victoria in the last four years, and the experience interstate and internationally is little different.

We won't ever find all these malicious actors, especially those operating offshore.

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But we must do far better – that’s why Victoria will lead the effort to find the long-term solutions that have so far evaded the world’s authorities.

The ACIC say the solution starts with “robust policies, legislation and regulation”, but it also needs a “strong approach to coordinated national enforcement” and “working collaboratively with industry and our communities”.

Above all, we need a “collective approach to targeting and disrupting” this organised crime threat that is hurting innocent people across Australia.

Victoria will lead that collective approach

Imposing a life sentence for this heinous crime is the first shot in this fight back – and our rallying principle to bring together government, police, industry and community to:

- understand how existing laws and ways of working aren’t keeping up with rapidly changing technology, and how to improve them
- determine who else can be involved to support the long-term collective approach, including to drive early intervention and reduce violence long-term

We will also look at what additional consequences the social media and online giants should face for allowing this recruitment to happen so blatantly on their platforms.

What else we’re doing

This is the second major reform announced in Victoria’s *Serious Consequences – Early Interventions* plan to reduce violent youth crime by reinforcing the boundaries for children, with guidance to keep them on track and serious consequences when they do wrong.

Serious consequences are a deterrent for children. That’s why we are also introducing *Adult Time for Violent Crime*, so jail is more likely and sentence lengths are longer.

In addition, tough bail laws have just come into effect, making it much harder to get bail if you’re charged with the worst crimes. The new Chief Commissioner is overhauling Victoria Police with more police on the street. And we’ve banned machetes – under our laws, you can go to jail simply for owning one.

Quotes Attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

“Children are getting exposed to shocking violence online every day. Without firm boundaries at home and school, some become targets for organised crime gangs who pull them into a world of violence. It’s a tragedy for those kids, and even more so for the innocent people they harm.”

“If you turn a child to a life of violence, I think you should spend your life in jail.”

“This is not about an excuse for violent children. They’ll face serious consequences with Adult Time For Violent Crime. This is about targeting the evil adult puppet-masters pulling the strings.”

Quotes Attributable to Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny

“A life sentence for these violent youth crime recruiters isn’t the end of this fight back, it’s just the beginning. As the experts say, we need a whole-of-society approach involving the whole country, and Victoria wants to lead it.”

“The extraordinary words of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission should focus the minds of every authority in Australia on the threat of organised crime recruiting children into violence.”