The Territory Government today delivered on its promise to end the use of restraint chairs in the youth justice system with the passage of the Youth Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

The law change means only handcuffs, ankle cuffs and waist-restraining belts can be used to restrain youth detainees. These are called ‘approved restraints’.

The changes to the Youth Justice Act also provide increased accountability on the use of approved restraints.

It specifies that an appropriate restraint can only be used in accordance with a determination by the Commissioner. This determination, which will ensure restraints are only used as a last resort, must be made available to the public.

Territory Families Minister Dale Wakefield introduced the legislation.

“The changes to the Youth Justice Act represent a significant policy shift on the use of restraints on youth detainees in the Territory,” Minister Wakefield said.

“There is no doubt that the images we saw on the Four Corners program had a significant impact on the community. I know this from the number of people who approached me in the street incredibly distressed at what they saw.

“This is about making sure that efforts to de-escalate behaviours are used in preference to difficult and dangerous restraint procedures.

“This makes it safer for our frontline workers. And it results in better outcomes for children that are in our care, many of whom come from a background of trauma and violence.

“This Bill also provides our frontline workers with greater clarity and certainty about actions to take. They are in difficult and potentially violent situations every day. These changes, along with increased training and professional support, will enable workers to minimise the seriousness of situations they encounter.”
Minister Wakefield said extensive consultation had taken place with unions – and continues still – on the effect of the law changes on staff and managing change processes, which includes training for workers.

This is about making our youth justice system a safer place – for detainees as well as Youth Justice officers.

“This training builds on the principles of trauma informed care in recognising that trauma may be a major factor in the young people’s lives, and staff need to understand how trauma may affect young people, and how they should interact.”

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