

Dear Janet and Blake

Thank you for raising these issues with all parties, and with me. I trust this response is of assistance and I am very happy to meet with you to discuss anything further.

Thank you for your letter of 17 July 2024 to the Independents for Canberra and thank you for the gentle reminder that you were awaiting a response. Your letter was forwarded to me for a reply and I have carefully considered my response. I have considered my knowledge to provide a response that respects the matters you raise, and the high esteem that I hold your organisation and what you are endeavouring to do.

All of the issues you have raised me with are important and deserve a carefully considered response. Importantly, I believe that engaging with the community is an important role when considering how best to respond to your questions. As someone seeking to represent the community where I live, understanding their views first hand will help inform and shape my position on the issues you've raised.

As part of this, I want to assure you and your members that self-determination is a key principle I stand behind. First Nations organisations and the communities they represent are best placed to determine their futures; mindful that our communities know what's best for us, better than anyone else.

I am a proud woman from the lands of the Kamilaroi people. I made Canberra my home over twenty years ago initially working in domestic, family and sexual violence. I remain here as I believe, as do my running mates in the Independents for Canberra (IFC), that Canberra should lead Australia on outcomes for anyone vulnerable in our community. As an Aboriginal woman I know my role is to bring forward the ideas of my brothers and sisters from all Aboriginal Communities and help their voices get heard. As a woman that has worked in the Canberra Community for more than 20 years, I know my role is to represent the voices of all those that are vulnerable.

I have seen trauma and disadvantage in every way possible. I understand first-hand the distress caused to communities where control and decision making is not in Indigenous hands. So naturally I am supportive of Indigenous controlled decision making. I acknowledge that a lot of hard work needs to happen to build opportunities, skills and employment pathways to have strong, enduring Indigenous leadership. We need our Indigenous leadership to be skilled and supported for success.

You would be aware that we have an elected body in the ACT, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. I have just stepped off the Elected Body after seven years to participate in this campaign. For years I have championed the importance of Indigenous led organisations, policy and solutions. I am also committed to having the courage where things are not working, we need to be fearless to act now and do what is needed.

The Elected Body and Transport Canberra and City Services have been working in partnership with Boomanulla and the progress is pleasing. We will work to ensure there is a date set, a time frame worked towards, and to keep community aware and updated on the journey back to Indigenous control.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is a model designed with the potential to provide services beyond what it is currently providing, including residential services. Again, an effective partnership between the Elected Body, representing the broader community, the ACT government, community and other stakeholders, will lead to better outcomes and ultimate community control.

The IFC has published its position that it wants a justice system that reduces recidivism and that leads the country on its justice system, rather than lagging as the worst on most metrics. For Indigenous Australians, we deserve to be strong in our identity and to have safety nets to catch our young people on their journey to truly thriving. Our justice system is not a safety net, it erodes a person's identity and their rightful place, their future and their children's future. I worked for a number of years at Bimberi Youth Detention Centre and with detainees at Alexander Machonochie Centre. These systems need real change, and real concerted effort on Indigenous based voices and solutions.

I was pleased to see the responsibility for delivery of the recommendations of *Our Booris Our Way* moved to the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) - National Voice for our Children. SNAICC is Indigenous led and has a proven history of working closely with others to drive change. The IFC was founded on the values of no voice unheard and that no one would get left behind and I have strong support from my colleagues to make children a priority. With actual closing of the gap, starts with changing the trajectory of the youngest.

IFC will push for all local politicians and public servants to look beyond the next term of government, taking a responsible stewardship approach to the wellbeing of current and future generations. This again, goes to the heart of what I want to see for Indigenous people, a better future envisioned, an ever-strengthened sense of culture and identity, the right support at the right time for the children, for those in the justice system, for those experiencing lack of safety at home. The right supports now to arrest the current trajectory and a build the better future.

You also raised the matter of housing and homelessness. Homelessness is a result of all of these issues discussed here, and housing and homelessness are the primary issues raised by people on the street talking to IFC candidates. Several of our candidates have been meeting with frontline organisations to understand what might make a difference for people ending up homeless or unable to access housing. We need to look to a future where less people are homeless rather than looking for new ways to build more shelters.

On housing, a matter raised often as we continue to meet people throughout the campaign, it is evident that we want a future where Indigenous people are considered outside of social and community housing and have the same choices as everyone. Solving the current crisis will take clever consideration of different models, rent to buy, tiny apartments, programs to reduce rent and the like. I want

Indigenous people to be able to choose from the full suite of options, acknowledging that much will need to change in individual's lives to achieve that choice, but what an aspiration.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was written after listening to hundreds of voices. I respect the process and I respect the outcome. I worked hard on the 'Yes' campaign and as difficult as the 'no' result was, I am only more determined to see the Statement implemented in full in the spirit in that it was written.

I want to assure you and your members that self-determination is a key principle we stand behind. First Nations organisations and the communities they represent are best placed to determine their futures; mindful they know what's best for their communities better than anyone else.

With this in mind, we want to continue engaging with key First Nations stakeholders on the issues you've raised, it's important, as a matter of respect and guidance, that we seek community views.

I want to thank you once again for raising these important matters with me and for taking the time to do so.

If I get elected it will be as a result of overcoming many barriers along the way, across a lifetime. We would work tirelessly with community, with the Elected Body, with organisations like yours, and other community organisations to remove those barriers for those that follow behind me.

My work finishes when my eyes close each night. I know that myself and my fellow IFC candidates will continue to be future focused for our generations to come, where we can leave a legacy for our children to aspire to.

Paula McGrady and the Independents for Canberra