

Hard truths for ACT Policing after mistaken arrest of Aboriginal teenager

The Commonwealth and ACT Ombudsman has made 8 recommendations to the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and ACT Policing after concluding an own motion investigation into the mistaken arrest of an Aboriginal teenager, 'Jay', on a Woden bus in November 2025.

'An innocent youth sitting on a bus was removed at gunpoint and the events that followed have had a significant ongoing negative impact on his wellbeing and mental health,' said ACT and Commonwealth Ombudsman, Iain Anderson.

The Ombudsman's investigation found that Jay was searched inappropriately and seemingly unlawfully, and that police failed in their responsibility to Jay as a young Aboriginal person who had been through a traumatic experience at their hands.

The Ombudsman also found a lack of communication between police officers about who had command, cumulative delays and misinformation, as well as missed opportunities for identification of the actual offender.

'I recognise that ACT Policing was responding to a fast-evolving incident requiring decisive action, but there are opportunities to improve ACT Policing's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their aftercare of innocent people who are caught up in their actions,' said Mr Anderson.

The Ombudsman found no evidence that Jay's Aboriginality led to increased use of force but is concerned that the AFP had no clearly understood definition of 'racial profiling'.

'I hold concerns that the AFP had no clearly understood definition of 'racial profiling' and have recommended ACT Policing review its use of race as a proxy to describe a person's physical traits and adopt objective descriptors,' added Mr Anderson.

During the investigation, the Ombudsman's office met with the teenager and his family, reviewed body-worn camera and CCTV footage, audio recordings of police transmissions, expert analyses, interviewed subject matter experts and reviewed policies, procedures and training related to uses of force, command and control, and engagement with children and young people and First Nations people.

'Multiple reviews have made recommendations on how ACT Policing can improve its relationship with the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This incident and the community reaction suggest there is still much work for ACT Policing to do, including listening and reflecting on hard truths,' concluded Mr Anderson.

On 11 November 2025, a 17-year-old Aboriginal youth boarded a bus in Woden and took a seat at the back. The bus left the interchange with more than 20 passengers on board, including other younger teenagers. A few minutes later, ACT Policing stopped the bus and 3 police officers entered with guns drawn.

Once off the bus, the teenager was brought to the ground, handcuffed and arrested before police realised they had made a mistake and that he was not the person of interest they were looking for. The teenager was released and apologised to, then searched, then put back on the bus.

The [full investigation report](#) is available on the ACT Ombudsman website.

For more information visit ombudsman.act.gov.au or for media enquiries email media@ombudsman.gov.au