



Minister for Children and Youth Justice
Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Our reference: CSYW 05278-2020

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Cnr George and Alice Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petition 3384-20 tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 8 September 2020 and the interim response tabled by Minister Farmer on 7 October 2020 regarding the Liberal National Party's (LNP's) 2020 election commitment to adopt a Child Protection Force.

The paramount principle for the administration of Queensland's Child Safety system is that the safety, wellbeing and best interests of a child, through childhood and for the rest of the child's life, come first.

The Queensland Government is committed to the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children and is continuing to implement its 10-year *Supporting Families, Changing Futures* reform program to ensure children and young people are safe, protected and supported to reach their full potential.

The Queensland Government invested \$1.3 billion in 2019-20 to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect and reform the family support and child protection system. That investment includes funding for an additional 38 frontline child safety staff who commenced work in 2019-20, increasing to 197 by the end of 2023-24. This is in addition to more than 450 new frontline child safety staff who have been funded since 2015. As a result of this investment, the average caseload per Child Safety Officer has been 18.1 cases or less for the tenth consecutive quarter – down from 21 per Child Safety Officer under the previous government.

In consultation with the Together Queensland Union, the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs has also developed a new Child Safety Workload Management Policy and Workload Management Manual (specific to Child Safety staff working with ongoing intervention cases), aimed at ensuring reasonable workloads for Child Safety staff. A pilot of the new policy and manual occurred during July and August 2020, with statewide implementation commencing on 31 August 2020.

Despite significant investment and reform, the system faces increasing pressures and demand. The department has received more than 125,000 reports over the past 12 months, or one every four minutes. While the drivers of this demand are complex and relate to multiple portfolios, including health, justice, housing and education, the department is committed to providing a frontline response to support families under pressure and keep Queensland children safe. There are currently almost 10,200 children in care, 670 more than last year. Further, over a third of children (38 per cent) who came into care during the 12 months to March 2020, had a parent with current or previous methamphetamine use recorded, up from 36 per cent the previous year.

The department is focused on ensuring the safety of children and families with complex needs. Mandatory drug testing is in place where drug use is suspected and it is safe for children to remain in the care of their parent/s. The department works closely with the Queensland Police Service through the multi-agency Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Team System, information sharing and mandatory reporting processes. A co-responder model also allows after-hours child safety teams to collaborate with police when it is necessary to remove a child at risk of harm during the night or attend high-risk situations.

As part of child and family reforms, Child Safety Officers are working more intensively with families during investigations to de-escalate risk to children. This intensive work with families is resulting in positive outcomes, with fewer children (3995) in the 12 months to March 2020 assessed as being in need of protection at the end of investigations compared to 2012-13 pre-reform figures (4460), despite more investigations being commenced.

The department is committed to improving systems to prevent further harm to children and holds itself accountable to the recommendations of the Child Death Case Review Panels, with an annual report of the panels publicly released each year. In July 2020, the panels were replaced by Queensland's new independent Child Death Review Board. The Board is one part of an expanded child death review process in Queensland, which aims to ensure all systems, not just child safety, are considered for necessary changes to promote the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people.

The presentation of any department responsible for child protection should support its role to protect and promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children. The use of a term like 'force' implies a punitive action, which would be counterproductive to supporting families and children. On 3 September 2020, PeakCare Queensland and the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak released a report on the LNP's proposal to rename the department the Child Protection Force. Of nearly 2000 respondents, 61.57 per cent disagreed with the proposal, with the majority raising concerns about negative connotations of the term 'force'.

While the Palaszczuk Government will not be implementing the LNP's policy to rename the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs to the 'Child Protection Force', the Premier and Minister for Trade asked the former Leader of the Opposition, Ms Deb Frecklington MP, to work with the government and my predecessor, the Honourable Di Farmer MP, former Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, to develop a new bipartisan approach to child safety in Queensland.

On 23 November 2020, I wrote to the new Opposition Child Safety spokesperson, Ms Amanda Camm MP to propose that the Opposition and Government continue to work together to ensure Queensland's child protection system is the best it can possibly be to protect vulnerable children.

I trust the information provided will be of assistance to the petitioners. I assure them that this Government remains committed to the service delivery model that best protects our children and young people and it will continue working to find solutions to keep children safe.

Yours sincerely



Leanne Linard MP
Minister for Children and Youth Justice and
Minister for Multicultural Affairs