



Hon John-Paul Langbroek MP
Minister for Education, Training and Employment

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie *Neil,*

I refer to e-Petition 2203-13 tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 11 February 2014 regarding the tragic case of 17 month old Mason Parker. My heartfelt condolences go to Mason's family, and I thank the community for demonstrating their support for the family through this petition.

I acknowledge and share the concern of petitioners regarding appropriate reporting of suspected child abuse and harm to Child Safety Services by staff of early childhood education and care services.

The Department of Education, Training and Employment is responsible for the regulation of education and care services in Queensland, under both national and state laws. These services are not operated by the Department; rather they are operated by private and community Approved Providers under the *Education and Care Services National Law* or the *Queensland Education and Care Services Act 2013* (ECS Act).

At the time of the tragic incident, the education and care service in question was regulated under the *Queensland Child Care Act 2002* (now repealed and replaced with the ECS Act). Under this Act, the licensee of a service was required to report to the Department any serious injury, harm, or suspected harm to a child that occurred in the course of provision of the service.

Although there is no legal requirement for services or their staff to mandatorily report suspected child abuse that occurs outside a service, child protection laws in Queensland enable *any* person to report suspicion about a child in need of protection. This also applies to staff working in early childhood education and care services. In addition, child care service providers are required to have policies and procedures in place to support when a report should be made to child protection authorities as part of the Working with Children Check (Blue Card) requirements.

Consistent with this approach, departmental policy recommends referral to the Queensland Police Service when there is a concern that a child is the victim of an offence and to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services where child protection concerns are identified by early childhood education and care staff, regardless of whether or not the harm occurs at a service.

In August 2013, the Department distributed a training and information resource to approved providers to offer further guidance around reporting suspected child harm or risk of harm that occurs either inside or outside the provision of the education and care service.

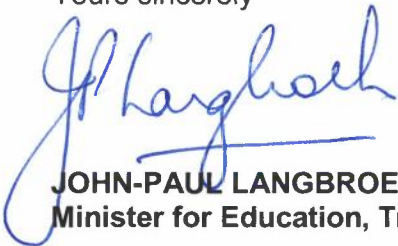
Additionally, the Department is working with other Queensland Government agencies to progress recommendations of the *Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry*, which aims to reform the child protection system to provide improved prevention, early intervention and support services to families, and to improve the statutory response to children at risk of significant harm.

I am advised that, as part of these reforms, Queensland's child protection laws will be clarified to provide greater guidance about when a report should be made to child protection authorities. Once relevant legislation has been passed by the Queensland Parliament, further training and guidance for the reporting of suspected child harm will be made available.

In the meantime, my Department will continue to work closely with approved providers to ensure they are aware of relevant policies and processes that exist to protect the safety and wellbeing of children accessing Departmental services.

I would like to thank petitioners for raising this important matter with me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Langbroek', with a stylized flourish underneath.

JOHN-PAUL LANGBROEK MP
Minister for Education, Training and Employment