

Your reference: 298-04

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Legislative Assembly of Queensland
Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 23 April 2004 forwarding a copy of a petition received in the House on 20 April 2004 concerning the current lack of early intervention and resources available to juveniles and their families, particularly in circumstances where the children are at risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm due to their own delinquent behaviours or through encouragement or enticement from someone outside the home. Petitioners requested that the House call for a review of the current policies and procedures within the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

I am pleased to advise that current policies and procedures within the *Child Protection Act 1999* are being revised to reflect recommendations of the January 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) Report "*Protecting Children: An Inquiry Into Abuse of Children in Foster Care*" March 2004 and the changes required for the new Department of Child Safety.

Stage One of the legislative reform will focus upon improved support and accountability arrangements that will have a direct beneficial impact on children in care and children most at risk including their families and carers. Stage One includes the new principles for child protection legislation, establishing the Department of Child Safety and introducing changes such as the Child Guardian powers, the Community Visitors Program, extending the role of the Children Services Tribunal and supporting the establishment of Child Safety Directors in each of the relevant departments. A number of these reforms involve changes to the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000*.

The Department of Child Safety has received extensive funding to address the current lack of early intervention and prevention services available to juveniles and their families in circumstances where the children are at risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm. The CMC report called for strong and enduring partnerships between the non-government and government sectors, to ensure that services delivered achieve best value for money and that gaps and duplication in the service continuum are identified and eliminated.

The report also calls for the creation of a needs based funding model and the exploration of ways in which Federal, State and Local Governments might play a more integrated role in the funding of a broad continuum of services to support children at risk and families in need.

There will also be extensive negotiations with peak agencies, regional and local area committees and other government departments to ensure a consistent and holistic view of the desired outcomes for the well-being of children and young people. Importantly, Department of Child Safety staff are being trained to reflect best practice in working with children and their families.

Stage 2 of the legislative reforms will contain legislation enabling all of the required enhancements to intake, assessment, care and placement practices to be implemented. It is expected that current policies and procedures will be reviewed and developed at the same time in partnership with stakeholders. Additional staff at departmental regional and area offices will also be employed and trained.

Stage 3 of the legislative reforms will include a number of remaining issues requiring considerable stakeholder consultation. This includes issues such as the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, voluntary placements and the best approach to regulating carers. It is proposed that statewide consultation is undertaken and community expectations clarified prior to enactment of this legislation. Again, current policies and procedures will be reviewed and developed alongside stakeholders.

The coming year will be one of significant change with a focus on children at risk of harm. The Department of Child Safety will be built with extra staffing, closer ties to funded non-government organisations, communities and peaks, legislative and policy development and a close partnership with the Department of Communities. The partnership will ensure a broad continuum of services to support children at risk and families in need, particularly in the areas of prevention and early intervention.

The Department of Communities will further assist communities across Queensland to be safe and secure by assisting to prevent crime, provide appropriate Youth Justice Services and by establishing an additional nine Youth Justice Services in Queensland. This initiative builds on the five existing services already successfully operating.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

HON MIKE REYNOLDS AM MP
Minister for Child Safety