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The Research Director
Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the *Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2014*.

Introduction

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

- Nelson Mandela

ACL commends the Queensland Government for taking action to address the crisis of child welfare in the state. Research has found an alarming increase in the last 15 years of children being reported as being victims of, or at risk of, child abuse or neglect, substantiated abuse or neglect cases, and children in state care.¹ In Queensland, the rate of children in out-of-home care, for example, has more than doubled in the last ten years to 6.8 per 1000 children. Only New South Wales, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory have higher rates.

ACL made a submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry in 2012. The resulting Carmody Report and the Queensland Government’s response to that has been an important step forwards in this country’s protection of children. ACL made a further submission to this Committee’s inquiry into the *Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2014*, the *Family and Child Commission Bill 2014*, and the *Public Guardian Bill 2014*.

ACL welcomes the addition of Doomadgee as a further welfare reform community under the Act.

Community Support for Child Protection

While the protection of children is a primary responsibility of government, it is desirable that communities actively work to prevent the need for government intervention. NGOs, churches, and

¹ See e.g. Professor Patrick Parkinson (July 2011), *For Kids’ Sake: Repairing the Social Environment for Australian Children and Young People*, The University of Sydney, p 6.

other family organisations should be encouraged and facilitated to play an even greater role in child protection and healthy family relationships.

One example of a community programme is COACH Community Mentoring. This programme supports families going through difficult situations such as isolation, parenting difficulties, financial hardships and unemployment, and so on. Nearly 50 churches are involved in offering the programme, with nearly 300 Coach Mentors actively engaged. The Programme is endorsed by World Vision CEO Tim Costello.²

Greater facilitation with these kinds of community programmes would be a primary example of how the Queensland Government can engage in preventative measures, strengthening families and relationships before there is a need for state intervention.

When it's not possible for children to remain with their families

The poor outcomes of foster care are now well recognised worldwide. If a child enters foster care and it is identified that their home is not safe to return to, they may well benefit from adoption. In this case, it is of the utmost importance that the child does not remain in out-of-home care longer than absolutely necessary. Jeremy Sammut describes the compounding of trauma on children who face abuse or neglect, are removed from their parents, and are continually bounced around in foster care to finally end in residential care before becoming homeless as adults.³

Conclusion

ACL commends the Government's initiative and commitment to improving the welfare of families and children in Queensland.

ACL recommends that in addition to measures such as those contained in this bill, the Government explore ways to facilitate with NGOs, churches, and communities involved in programmes such as the COACH Community Mentoring Programme.

Yours sincerely,



***Wendy Francis
Queensland Director
Australian Christian Lobby***

² See "The COACH Story" promotional video, <http://vimeo.com/53058999>.

³ Jeremy Sammut (2011), 'Do Not Damage and Disturb: On Child Protection Failures and the Pressure on Out of Home Care in Australia', *Centre for Independent Studies*, <http://www.cis.org.au/images/stories/policy-monographs/pm-122.pdf>.