

24/12/2020

Community Support and Services Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

### **Submission on the Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill ("the Bill").

#### **Relevance of proposed legislative amendments to the St Vincent de Paul Society**

The St Vincent de Paul Society- Queensland (the Society) provides therapy and support services to children and families who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, child abuse and neglect. In partnership with the Queensland Government, the Society delivers a number of services to children subject to child protection orders, including therapy and in-home support to parents working towards family preservation and reunification.

In consultation with its membership and other community leaders, the St Vincent de Paul Society's vision is to keep children connected to their community, culture and extended family, while recognising that the Department holds the responsibility to assess ongoing safety, reunification or long-term care options.

#### **Amendment of Child Protection Act 1999**

##### **Amendment of section 5BA (Principles for achieving permanency for a child)**

The St Vincent de Paul Society- Queensland supports the views outlined in Peakcare's submission which notes that there is currently a suite of options for permanency in Queensland and that adoption is already offered and well understood as a means to achieve permanency in the Child Protection Act 1999. However the most suitable permanency option for each individual child's needs and circumstances is not determined by a hierarchy of options, nor by an ideologically directed priority placed on adoption as a solution, but should be determined by the most suitable permanency option for each individual child's needs and circumstances.

Our experience working in the preservation and reunification space leads us to recommend that more resources be provided to birth families to adequately address the child protection concerns in order for children to achieve safe permanency with their birth families.

We also recognise and support the concerns raised by the Office of the Public Guardian for parents caught up in the child safety system who live with a disability (particularly an intellectual, cognitive or psychosocial disability) where this is then cited as evidence of their inability to care for their child at a point in time and we similarly share the concern that being deprived of ongoing assistance to fulfil the valued role of a parent may represent a potential breach of their human rights. We also support the view that changes to child protection processes be made to allow children and parents to remain together and receive funded support, either at home or in specialist accommodation for families, in circumstances where no actual harm to the child has been substantiated, or otherwise where it is safe for children to remain at home with appropriate support.

We also support the view that the Child Protection Act 1999 should be amended to include a requirement that the Department prove that adequate resources and support were provided to biological families (including extended family) when making an application for an order that would lead to removing a child from their family.

We support with the views cited by the Benevolent Society when it states that the proposed changes may channel increased numbers of children through to adoption, "locking in future trauma for vulnerable children and their carers without provision in the Bill for post-adoption support also risks creating considerable demands for services."

Finally we support the views expressed by QCOSS that alternative models to achieving permanency that do not sever the child's right to have a connection with their birth family should be explored, as well enhancing the voices of children and young people in discussions and decisions regarding permanency planning at all stages of their development.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Mercer', with a stylized, cursive script.

Kevin Mercer

Chief Executive Officer

St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland