



29 August 2017

## Children, Youth and Families

Committee Secretary  
Health, Communities, Disability Services, and Domestic and  
Violence Prevention Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

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Dear Secretary,

### RE: Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017

Churches of Christ Care welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017. We welcome this amendment as an important step towards implementing the recommendations from the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry and the *Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*.

Churches of Christ Care offers a broad range of services for children, young people and families throughout Queensland. These services include early learning and care, family support, out-of-home care and transition to independence programs, with support provided based on the needs and interests of children, young people, families and individual communities.

In reviewing the document, Churches of Christ Care offers the following high level principles that we believe should apply consistently to all legislative changes. These are:

- Incorporating opportunities for children and young people to have a voice including through collaborative case planning processes.
- Applying the Indigenous child placement principle consistently and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are safe, cared for and connected to community and culture.
- Ensuring we are taking a community engagement and community development approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children, young people families and community.
- Identifying and supporting at risk families and potential carers early to ensure placements can be sustained and are high quality, nurturing and safe.

### Changes to the paramount principle

Churches of Christ Care supports changes to the paramount principle to ensure long-term impacts are considered alongside immediate need when making decisions in the best interest of children and young people. This updated principle is particularly relevant alongside the Indigenous Child Placement Principle.

*Bringing the light of Christ into communities*



### **Focusing on permanency**

Churches of Christ Care supports permanency planning. We particularly welcome the preference for the child to be cared for by family or other suitable person before the chief executive (Clause 6 s.5BA(4)(b)). This change will provide a greater focus on establishing placements with kin and maintaining children's connection to family and culture.

To implement these changes effectively significant community engagement will need to occur to identify carers and plan for placements. There will also need to be a strong policy connection between the new permanency measures and developing and implementing cultural support plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

### **Voice of children and young people**

The *Child Protection Act 1999* provides guidance through Section 5E around how the views of children should be obtained. However, there is no specific principle to ensure the views of children and young people are obtained wherever practical.

Churches of Christ Care believes that hearing the voice of children and young people is in their best interest and is a key part of delivering on the paramount principle. Obtaining, valuing and making decisions based on the views of children and young people is an important aspect of building their self-worth and capacity to self-advocate. Hearing and acting on the views of children and young people is a vital part of ensuring their long-term wellbeing.

**We recommend** introducing a new principle in Section 5B or 5E to ensure a child will have their views heard in matters relating to their care whenever possible.

### **Permanent care orders**

Churches of Christ Care supports the proposed permanent care order where this option is in the best interests of a child and is strongly linked to cultural support plans as required. This new order is an important step to providing stronger legal permanency for children and young people who are unable to return to their family.

When making a permanent care order, it is vital the views of children and young people are taken into account. While seeking the views of children where possible is a part of any child protection order, this is particularly important when making a permanent care order.

**Churches of Christ Care recommends** amending the legislation to require the views of children and young people be considered by the courts when making a permanent care order.

### **Transition from care**

Churches of Christ Care welcomes amendments to require transition planning for young people from age 15 with an option of receiving support until age 25.

Transition to adulthood is a challenging time for many young people, even those from relatively stable homes or family environments. While global research clearly identifies the extreme vulnerability of young people leaving statutory care, it also indicates significant opportunities to intervene early and turn the course of their lives around. The proposed legislative changes are a positive step towards ensuring young people are supported as they move into adulthood. However, this change needs to be supported by appropriate resourcing to ensure it is translated into policy and practice.



### **Promoting safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families, communities and cultures**

Churches of Christ Care supports the proposed amendments aiming to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, improve access to cultural advice and delegate decision-making powers to community-controlled organisations.

When implementing these changes we believe they must be accompanied by localised capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. This is vital to ensure organisations and communities are set for success and to deliver a consistent standard of care across Queensland. We also strongly support additional steps to include the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families as these reforms are implemented.

### **Information sharing**

Churches of Christ Care welcomes and supports the proposed amendments to enable specialist services providers to share information with other entities for particular purposes. This will allow non-government providers to develop a full picture of a family's history to more effectively target work with families to protect children. We would also support formal opportunities and networks for information sharing, which are collaborative and community based.

### **Pregnant women and unborn children**

Churches of Christ Care supports amendments to allow relevant information sharing on pregnant women and their unborn children. Sharing this information increases the capacity of support services to engage with women to work towards stabilising their family situation prior to the birth of their child. This is an important opportunity for early intervention services to engage with at risk families before birth.

If you have any further questions regarding our submission, you can contact me [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Leanne Rutherford  
General Manager – Children, Youth and Families