

Submission from Parents on a Mission to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, Parliament House - Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020

Parents on a Mission asks for reconsideration of the proposed amendment:

'To enhance the approach to permanency under the Child Protection Act, 1999; clarify that adoption is an option for achieving permanency for children in care, as part of the suite of long-term care options available; and clarify the importance of and promote alternative permanency options for children under the long-term care of the Chief Executive'

2/8/2020

Parents on a Mission has been in operation for 1.5 years and represents the views and voices of Parents in the Child Protection system with and without a disability. Parents on a Mission is made up of Parents, Carers and former Departmental staff. We collectively voice our opinions through our lived experience of different parts of the Queensland Child Protection system, so that Government can be given an opportunity to see through our collective lens.



The death of any child is a tragedy. Parents on a Mission recognises that there are some Parents in our society that harm their children or knowingly put their children at risk of harm. Parents on a Mission also recognises that many Parents just need help. Parents who come into contact with the Child Protection system should not all be painted with the same brush. We have **not** all abused our children. There are many reasons children are removed from their Parents care, including domestic violence, neglect, drug abuse, mental illness etc

An increased focus on adoption is not what Parents want, in fact, we want the exact opposite - more children returned to their families

"It's crazy that they are doing this, why are they making it harder for us??? A lot of Mums won't ask for help now, they'll be too afraid." - Parent

The Department of Child Safety have responded to the Coroner's recommendations by agreeing to implement all 6 of them. Unfortunately, if the emphasis is placed upon adoption, we are afraid that this will give rise to a non-aboriginal 'stolen generation' forever changing the outcomes for families.

The fear of having your children removed from your care is overwhelming *but the fear of never being able to get your child back and instead of coming home they are adopted out - horrifying...*

"I have three kids still in care because with my mental health issues it was only practical for me to get four kids home in two years, as I also had a baby in this time. My kids want to come home to me they don't want to be adopted. In a few years time I will be able to bring them home but bringing 7 kids home in 2 years is impossible for people like me. That doesn't mean we deserve to lose each other forever. I am one of the families which has zero drug use, zero alcohol use and zero domestic violence. Also why does race play a role in this??? I'm glad Indigenous children won't be adopted but white and other race people want to keep their children too!!! Why are we all lumped in with the druggies?" Parent

Parents on a Mission recommendations:

1. Long term care is seen as a 'set and forget' order - let's take a long hard look at those cases. Could these children go home? Some Parents end up giving up when their children are in these orders. Let's take a second look at these cases and help reduce the number of kids in care by reuniting them with their families.
2. Bring Parents into the forefront of making legislation that will encourage the positive relationships between Parents and Departmental staff, instead of creating legislation (encouraging adoption as a permanency option) that increases the power imbalance between them
3. Increase mental health supports for families involved in the system, with a focus to work with a family throughout their case, regardless of length of time of the order/s

On the proposed amendment:

Adoption should only be used when all other options have been exhausted. Families deserve every chance to be brought back together.

The Department of Child Safetys' website states:

'We focus on safety, belonging and wellbeing and support the delivery of services to build families' capacity to care for and nurture their children.'

Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. The members of Parents on a Mission reflect the view that the opposite is what they have experienced -

"The Department has to train us to focus on helping families whilst giving support! Not taking their child away and cutting them off from their families. Adoption leaves kids forever searching for their true families and identity. Strengthen extended families, parents and deal with the underlying reasons that families aren't coping. Poverty, stress, housing, jobs. Drug use is a health issue, a symptom of deeper issues." Former Staff

POAM Recommendations

1. Take a second look at LTG orders

Unfortunately, many children end up on LTG orders because of the new legislation around limiting the duration of consecutive short term orders to a total period of 2 years from the commencement of the first order.

This puts tremendous strain on Parents to complete all aspects of the case plan within that time. Not all situations are the same and the Department tend to not balance out case planning to factor in the real world consequences of either reunifying too fast or waiting too long to progress contact etc, therefore opening the door to setting up Parents to fail. This then ultimately leads to LTG or permanent care orders, which could have been prevented if Parents were given more time and more balanced case planning took place.

As LTG orders tend to be 'set and forget' orders, a lot of Parents give up, having fought for many years to have their children returned to their care. There is simply an underlying culture of 'you will have monthly contact and you won't be able to get them home until they are 18' and no incentives whatsoever to better yourself or change the circumstances that brought you to the Departments attention.

From lived experience, Parents tell POAM that they want a chance to:

- Show their parenting ability to progress even on an LTG order
- Have their cases reviewed annually, with their input
- Be listened to about the detrimental impact monthly contact has on them and their children and change monthly contact to weekly contact
- Change the way they are treated when it comes to transition. From the age of 16, the transition to independence needs to include a plan to reintegrate children back into the family/extended family unit, instead of leaving it up to the family at 18
- Receive legal aid for court regardless of 'merit' to change/revoke LTG orders

If the Department were to consider this recommendation, the suggested amendment concerning adoption would not have to be considered, as there would then be a mechanism in place to remove more children from LTG orders back into their families. This makes sense on so many levels and would save the Government and Queensland taxpayers millions of dollars each year.

2. Bring Parents into the forefront of making legislation that will encourage the positive relationships between Parents and Departmental staff, instead of creating legislation (encouraging adoption as a permanency option) that *increases* the power imbalance

Unfortunately, from the lived experience of the members of POAM, their experiences vary when it comes to their relationships with Departmental staff. Not only is there a power imbalance but extreme fear, which regularly results in anger towards the Department and Departmental staff. This fear will be markedly increased if this amendment is implemented.

Bringing Parents into the co-creation of legislation that directly impacts their lives and the lives of their children and gives them the opportunity to show others what their decision making processes end results are. It also increases awareness of how the fear of having their children adopted out can have a detrimental effect on a Parents ability to work effectively with Departmental staff and ultimately, limit their ability to change their lives.

3. Increase mental health supports for families involved in the system, with a focus to work with a family throughout their case, regardless of length of time of the order/s

The mental health impact of this amendment is staggering. The anxiety and depression that families within the system go through is already at an extreme level. From the membership of POAM alone, 95% of all members, including carers and former staff, report accessing mental health support in the last 5 years.

Parents who have proper mental health supports throughout their case are more likely to:

- proactively meet their case plan goals
- Recover from addiction
- Leave an abusive relationship
- Be an active participant in their children's lives
- Be a productive member of society

If this amendment is passed it will increase the toll on the mental health of families, decrease the capacity of Parents to be in their children's lives and increase the already overloaded community mental health supports for years to come.

The pain of losing your children is overwhelming and most Parents do everything in their power to change their lives in order to bring their children home

Looking back I felt that what happened forced me to look within myself and step up and it forced me to be the best parent I could be At the time it was extremely difficult and I didn't think I deserved to have my son taken but now I see it as a blessing Just look inside yourself, it wastes time to externalize your anger." Parent

Parents on a Mission submit that adoption is not going to be in children's and families best interests and to encourage the use of adoption as a permanency option when it's already in place as an option for some situations is putting more strain and fear on Parents than ever before.

"Children have a right to their true forever families. An adopted family is NOT a forever family. Being adopted leaves its mark of forever being cut off from ones true forever family. Strengthen extended families and communities as Carmody Enquiry stated. Don't go backwards. Will bring more problems. Adoption can be for the middle class parents needs rather than children's. They want and need their true families and they need their families helped!!!! Don't fob off the issue and the recommendations. Adoption is avoiding taking responsibility to provide appropriate help and resources to families under pressures due to problems that are systemic and economic. No to easy swift adoption to avoid facing the real issues here" Carer

Parents on a Mission is committed to providing the lived experience of its members to Government on all issues pertaining to the Child Protection system and to collaborate to find solutions that will benefit the lives of children and their families.

Thank you for taking the time to read our submission.

Parents on a Mission

CEO

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