

**Question on Notice
No. 1893
Asked on 27 November 2008**

MR ELMES MP asked the Minister for Child Safety (MRS KEECH)-

QUESTION:

With reference to children and young people under temporary assessment orders (TAOs) and child protection orders (CPOs) —

“Will she provide the details of payments made to commercial accommodation providers (listed individually) for the purpose of providing accommodation to children and young people under TAOs and CPOs (listed separately by order) for 2007-08 and 2008-09 year to date?”

ANSWER:

Protecting vulnerable Queensland children is a priority of the Bligh Government.

Our commitment is unquestioned: the Government has established a stand-alone Department of Child Safety; we have trebled the Department's budget; we have almost doubled the number of frontline staff.

More is being done to ensure the safety of children whose parents do not – or will not – look after them.

We are expanding the range of placement options available for at-risk children – by recruiting more foster carers, establishing small group homes and therapeutic residentials and through our program of providing safe houses in discreet Indigenous communities, so children can be placed in a safe environment while we are assessing the best placement for them.

We will have no hesitation removing children from environments in which they are emotionally, physically or sexually abused. Sometimes that requires accommodation in commercial premises.

Commercial accommodation is used as a last resort, or in emergency situations – when no suitable alternative placement is immediately available.

Not all children can be immediately placed within a stable kinship or foster home. Commercial accommodation ensures the immediate physical needs of the child are met, while providing workers with an opportunity to explore both the child's own family networks, as well as the alternative care system, to identify a more appropriate, stable, long-term placement that best meets the needs of the child.

The length of placement in commercial accommodation may vary based on the individual needs of the child or young person. In some cases children may remain for overnight only before being transitioned to kinship or foster care. In other cases, for example, with sibling groups, the Department may require additional time to locate a placement with carers who can best meet the needs of the individual children, while also ensuring that brothers and sisters remain placed together.

The estimated expenditure, on commercial accommodation, including labour costs, for 2007-08 financial year was \$819,609.

The estimated expenditure, including labour costs, for 2008-09 financial year to date (October 2008) is \$265,667.

The cost for commercial accommodation is expected to continually decrease over time due to establishment of Placement Services Units in the zones and increased recruitment of foster carers through the Bligh Government's foster carer recruitment campaign.

As I said, commercial accommodation is used as a last resort, or in emergency situations. It is an interim measure, used until a more appropriate placement is available. The alternative is to leave children in an environment where they are at extreme risk of harm. The Bligh Government will not do that.