



WITNESS FACT SHEET

The Child Safety Commission of Inquiry is conducting public hearings in cities and towns across Queensland, commencing in September 2025 and throughout 2026.

Knowing who people are, what their role is and generally what to expect during a public hearing will help you better understand the proceedings.

What is a public hearing?

A public hearing is a formal proceeding in which witnesses give evidence, under oath or affirmation, to the Commission about issues and events that are relevant to the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Public hearings are open to the general public to observe and will be live-streamed on the Commission's website, except in circumstances where the Commission decides it is in the public interest not to allow the public or any portion of the public to be present. This may be because of the subject matter of the inquiry or the nature of the evidence to be given.

All public hearings are recorded, and a transcript of the proceedings (or public parts of the proceeding) will be published on the Commission's website.

Where will the public hearings be held?

The public hearings will be held in a range of locations around Queensland. The venues for public hearings will generally be court or tribunal hearing rooms and, at times, conference facilities.

Who will be present at the public hearing?

The Commissioner

The Honourable Paul Anastassiou KC has been appointed as the Commissioner to lead the Commission of Inquiry. The Commissioner will preside over the public hearings and receive evidence from witnesses. The Commissioner may ask questions of any witness. Witnesses should address the Commissioner as "Commissioner".

Counsel Assisting

A team of barristers has been appointed to advise and assist the Commissioner. They are known as "Counsel Assisting". The primary role of Counsel Assisting at a public hearing is to call and question witnesses and make submissions to the Commissioner about the evidence. Counsel Assisting will sit at a long table called a Bar Table.

Queensland Government

A team of barristers will appear for the State of Queensland at each public hearing. They do not work for the Commission of Inquiry. They may be given leave by the Commissioner to ask questions of witnesses about the matters relevant to the Commission's work. These barristers will also sit at the Bar Table.

Other interested parties may apply for leave to appear at the Commission. The Commissioner may grant permission for legal counsel to appear at the public hearings on behalf of individuals, organisations, service providers, and government agencies whose interests may be affected. This permission should be sought in advance of the hearing.



Instructing solicitors or other lawyers

Other lawyers, including solicitors who are helping Counsel Assisting or the State of Queensland's barristers, may also sit at or near the Bar Table.

Other staff working with the Commission of Inquiry

Commission staff will be present on the day and able to assist you with any questions you may have.

Witnesses

A witness is a person who has been called to appear before the Commission of Inquiry. The role of the witness is to answer questions asked by Counsel Assisting, the Commissioner, and by other Counsel (if permitted by the Commissioner).

Associate

An Associate provides administrative support to the Commission of Inquiry administering the oath or affirmation to a witness.

Members of the Public & Media

As the Commission of Inquiry will consider matters of public interest, public hearings can be observed by any person, including members of the media (subject to the exception set out above).

The media may organise for a cameraman to be present at the public hearings to film footage of the proceeding.

The Commissioner can make orders about how information is to be or is not to be reported by the media. This includes keeping the identity of a witness confidential if there is a reason for this.

What does it mean to be a witness?

Generally speaking, Counsel Assisting selects witnesses to be called. Witnesses may also be called by other parties, including the State of Queensland, if the Commissioner allows.

The Commission of Inquiry will contact you in advance to inform you that you will be required as a witness at a specific public hearing. You may be invited to attend a conference with one or more Commission staff to talk about your evidence. You may be asked to provide documents that are relevant to your oral evidence.

An outline of your proposed evidence may be prepared by the Commission staff in consultation with you. This is a document about your relevant experiences and knowledge that summarises, at a high level, the evidence you will give to the Commission. The Commission may ask your consent for that outline of evidence to be published on its website. As a matter of fairness, this outline of evidence may be provided to any person whose interests may be affected by your evidence, including the State of Queensland.

Prior to the hearing, you will be provided with a formal document called a 'summons'. This document outlines the date and time you are required to attend the hearing and provides you with legal protections for appearing before the hearing. Where possible, the Commission of Inquiry will work to accommodate your prior commitments.

The summons to attend the public hearing as a witness is a court order that you must comply with unless you have a reasonable excuse. If you have a reasonable excuse, you must tell the Commission in advance. If you fail to attend, a warrant for your arrest may be issued to bring you to the public hearing to give evidence.



If you need assistance to give evidence

If you need assistance to appear as a witness at a public hearing (for example, due to medical reasons or because English is not your first language), please advise Commission staff in advance of the hearing and necessary accommodations will be considered.

Hearing Etiquette and the Process of Giving Evidence

Prior to the public hearing

- **Check your summons** for the public hearing location, time and date.
- **Dress in a neat and tidy manner.** You are not required to wear formal attire.
- **Bring a copy of any documents.** This should include a copy of the summons and your outline of evidence.
- **Arrive 30 minutes before** you are scheduled to give evidence. A staff member from the Commission of Inquiry will speak to you before you enter the courtroom to give your evidence.
- **Wait outside the courtroom until you are called.** Usually, witnesses are not allowed in the courtroom prior to giving evidence. At times, there are unexpected delays and you may need to wait until you are called to give your evidence.

When called to give evidence

- When you are required, your name will be called and you will be asked to **enter the hearing room.** Bow your head to the Commissioner as you enter the courtroom.
- You will then be directed to **sit in the witness box.** The Commissioner will ask whether you prefer to take an oath, affirmation or declaration. This is to confirm that you will tell the truth.
- **Counsel Assisting and/or the Commissioner will then ask you questions.** If you have provided an outline of evidence, you will usually be shown a copy of that document and you may refer to it while giving evidence.
- **Other parties granted leave to appear may ask you questions about your evidence.** This will be up to the Commissioner.
- **You are required to answer the questions asked of you.**
- **You will be excused.** The length of your evidence will depend on the circumstances. When all parties have finished asking questions, the Commissioner will excuse you. You may then leave the hearing, or you can stay seated in the public gallery to observe rest of the public hearing.

Legal Assistance

The following services can be contacted if you would like to obtain legal advice. Alternatively, you may choose to contact a legal firm of your choice.

Please note: The Commission of Inquiry is unable to provide legal representation or legal advice to witnesses appearing at a public hearing.

Legal Aid Queensland

For information and referral for legal advice, and advice on whether you qualify for free legal aid.

Phone: 1300 65 11 88

Website: www.legalaid.qld.gov.au

Queensland Law Society

For names of legal firms in your area that specialise in Commissions of Inquiries.

Phone: 1300 367 757

Website: www.qls.com.au



Community Legal Centres Queensland

Find your nearest Community Legal Centre.
Phone: (07) 3392 0092
Website: www.communitylegalqld.org.au/

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service

A legal service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland.
Phone: 1800 012 255 (free call)
Website: <https://atsils.org.au/>

Assistance

If you need help to attend the public hearing to give evidence, please discuss this with the Commission of Inquiry as soon as you receive your summons.

Counselling and Support Services

Counselling and support can be offered from the **National Counselling and Referral Service Blue Knot** by calling **1800 421 468** or visit their website <https://blueknot.org.au/> for more support. This service is open 9am to 6pm weekdays or 9am to 5pm weekends AEST.

If you require support in another language, you can use the free Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) by also calling the **National Counselling and Referral service on 1800 421 468** and requesting an interpreter or the TIS national on **131 450** and ask to be connected to the National Counselling and Referral Service.

Support can be given from **13YARN** providing crisis support 24/7 to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a culturally safe space. To access support contact **13 92 76** to speak to a crisis supporter. Otherwise contact **enquiries@13yarn.org.au** or visit their website <https://www.13yarn.org.au/contact-us-13yarn> for further details.

Support and Counselling can be given through **Lifeline** which provide 24 hour / 7 days phone crisis support. Contact through **13 11 14** or visit their website <http://www.lifeline.org.au/> for further support.

Support services can be given to past and present carers through **Carer Gateway**, a national online and phone service that provides practical information and resources to support carers. Connect to local support services by contacting **1800 422 737** or visit their website <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/> for more information.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family support, contact **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services** on **1300 177 095** which provide free and confidential support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Alternatively, visit their website <http://www.familywellbeingqld.org.au/> for more information.