



Charlene's story

Disclaimer: This is the story of a person who shared their personal experience with the Commission of Inquiry through a submission or interview. The names in this story are pseudonyms and identifying details have been removed. The person who shared this experience may not have been a witness and their account is not evidence. They did not take an oath or affirmation before providing the story.

Nothing in this story constitutes a finding of fact by the Commission of Inquiry. Instead, these stories have been published to show how people are experiencing the current child safety system in Queensland. Any views expressed are those of the person who shared their experience, not of the Commission of Inquiry.

Content warning: Some material may be distressing. These statements may include references to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, suicide, or self-harming behaviours, and may contain strong or confronting language. Some narratives may be about First Nations people who have passed away. Readers are encouraged to engage with this material in a way that supports their wellbeing.

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1. My role and purpose of this submission

This submission is made in response to the **Queensland Commission's call for submissions** regarding the operation of the child protection legal process.

I am the biological paternal grandmother of Child A. I provide this submission to assist the Commission's systemic review of Queensland's child protection litigation and decision-making framework, based on my direct and ongoing experience as a family member, proposed kinship carer, and complainant.

This matter is **ongoing and currently before the Children's Court**, with Child Safety seeking a longer-term child protection order. This submission does **not** seek to influence or pre-empt matters before the Court. It is provided to inform the Commission's review of how the system operates in practice for children and families, and the detrimental effects that arise alongside and beyond court proceedings.

2. Initial intervention and court involvement

In early November 2025, the Department of Child Safety filed an **Application for a Court Assessment Order** under section 38 of the *Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)*.

The application identified serious and immediate safety concerns, including that:

- the mother attempted suicide while Child A was in her care;
- Child A, approximately three months old, was left unattended; and
- a knife was located beside him.

I acknowledge the seriousness of these events and the necessity of urgent protective action where risk is present. My submission focuses on the **systemic impacts that followed**, particularly how family options, contact, and decision-making were managed thereafter.



3. Events following the mother's actions and the father's response

Following these events:

- Child A was given into the care of his father;
- the father attempted to bring Child A to us, his paternal grandparents, so Child A could be safely cared for by family; and
- Child Safety sought court orders after the father had already left while attempting to bring Child A to our care.

This demonstrates that family-based care was available and actively pursued, yet was not utilised. The failure to prioritise this option has had ongoing consequences for Child A's stability and family relationships.

4. Police removal at my home and its traumatic impact

A particularly distressing event occurred when Queensland Police attended my home and removed Child A:

- Child A was removed from my home in front of my two children, aged 6 and 8;
- the father was not allowed to say goodbye to his son;
- Child Safety officers were not present; and
- police indicated Child A would be transported in the back of a police vehicle, on an officer's lap, to the police station.

Child A was safe, supervised, and with family at the time. This event caused significant trauma to my children and to Child A's father, and it undermined confidence in the system's commitment to least-intrusive, child-centred practice. It illustrates how operational decisions, separate from court orders, can cause avoidable harm to children and families.

5. Delays and the detrimental effect on attachment and family stability

Since Child A's removal, **delays in Child Safety responses and decision-making** have significantly hindered Child A's relationship with his paternal family.

For an infant, delay is not neutral. These delays have:

- limited bonding opportunities;
- weakened attachment and relational continuity;
- entrenched a status quo that is difficult to reverse; and
- contributed to the erosion of safe family relationships during critical developmental stages.

The cumulative effect of these delays is detrimental to both Child A and his extended family.



6. Inconsistent family contact arrangements

Currently:

- the father is limited to **1.5 hours of supervised contact once per week**; while
- the mother has been permitted **unsupervised contact with her parents**.

This is despite the risks relied upon to justify urgent intervention. This inconsistency raises concerns about proportionality, neutrality, and consistency in risk assessment and decision-making.

I also requested that Child A spend the **Easter weekend** with our family. Child Safety advised that the mother would not consent and indicated that, although Child Safety can override consent, they would need to “have a case” to do so. From a family perspective, this demonstrates one-sidedness and an over-reliance on maternal consent, rather than the neutral exercise of statutory responsibility.

7. Denial of overnight contact to paternal family members

Further:

- my mother, Child A’s biological great-grandmother, requested overnight contact, which was denied; and
- my sister, Child A’s biological aunt, also requested overnight contact, which was denied.

No identified risks have been raised in relation to these households. These refusals further restrict Child A’s opportunity to form secure relationships with paternal kin and deepen the separation caused by delay.

8. Kinship care decisions and geographic inconsistency

I have been advised that I am **not being considered as a kinship carer**, primarily due to geographic distance (approximately eight hours away).

However:

- Child A has been placed in kinship care with the maternal grandmother; and
- that household was associated with drug use, domestic violence, and instability prior to intervention.

Distance has been treated as a decisive barrier for paternal kin, while documented safety concerns did not prevent placement with maternal kin. This inconsistency undermines confidence in the fairness and objectivity of kinship decision-making.

9. Current position: 18-month order sought while kinship remains excluded



Child Safety is now seeking an **18-month child protection order** on the basis that neither parent is willing or able to care for Child A.

Despite this:

- paternal kinship care remains excluded;
- Child Safety will not support care without ongoing statutory intervention; and
- geographic distance continues to be cited as the primary reason.

When long-term orders are contemplated, stability, permanency, and family connection should be prioritised. Instead, ongoing exclusion of safe kin risks entrenching separation and long-term relational harm.

10. Identity and family context

Identity factors: My partner and my children identify culturally. **Child A does not identify.** However, Child A is part of a family unit where cultural identity, values, and connections are actively lived and maintained. This family context is relevant to Child A's sense of belonging, continuity, and identity as he grows. Despite this, these factors have not been taken into consideration in planning, placement, or contact decision-making.

11. Complaints process and accountability

I lodged a complaint. While I have since heard from Child Safety, the delay in response and lack of substantive outcomes highlight systemic weaknesses in the complaints process. In child protection matters, delayed responses can themselves cause harm by allowing family relationships to deteriorate over time.

12. What this experience demonstrates about the system

My experience demonstrates:

- relational harm caused by delay, particularly for infants;
- inconsistent and perceived one-sided decision-making;
- underuse of existing legislative and policy pathways for kinship and contact;
- insufficient transparency and accountability; and
- a failure to adequately recognise the cumulative impact on families.

13. Suggested improvements for consideration by the Commission

I respectfully suggest the Commission consider reforms to ensure:



1. Enforceable response timeframes and escalation mechanisms for complaints and contact decisions.
2. Consistent and neutral application of kinship and contact provisions across both sides of a child's family.
3. Greater recognition of the harm caused by delay and prolonged restriction of family contact.
4. Proper utilisation of existing legislative and policy pathways for provisional kinship approval and distance-based assessments.
5. Decision-making that prioritises stability, permanency, and family connection when long-term orders are sought.

14. Closing statement

I make this submission in response to the Queensland Commission's call for submissions, and with respect for the Children's Court process, while Child A's matter remains ongoing.

My experience demonstrates how inconsistency, delay, and one-sided decision-making can cause significant and lasting detriment to children and families by fracturing relationships, undermining attachment, and eroding trust in the child protection system.

I respectfully ask the Commission to consider reforms that ensure Queensland's child protection legal process operates fairly, consistently, transparently, and in a manner that prevents foreseeable harm to family relationships while protecting children.