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CHILD SAFETY COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STATE OF QUEENSLAND

PROACTIVE STATEMENT NO. 1

STATEMENT OF BELINDA DREW

I, **Belinda Drew**, of care of Crown Law, Level 11, 50 Ann Street, Brisbane, Director-General, Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (**the Department**) in the State of Queensland state as follows:

1. I hold a Bachelor of Teaching, and a Bachelor of Social Work (Hons).
2. As Director-General, I have responsibility for leading the Department across its portfolio responsibilities which includes families, seniors and carers; community recovery; disability services; domestic and family violence; and child safety.
3. Prior to commencing as Director-General, I held the positions of Deputy Director-General, Women’s Safety, and Victims and Community Support within the then Department of Justice and Attorney-General, the Deputy Director-General, Communities within the then Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts and Chief Executive Officer of the Community Services Industry Alliance.

Overview of statutory child protection services in Queensland

4. Queensland’s child protection system is governed by the *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld) (CP Act) and the *Child Protection Regulation 2023* (Qld), which provide the legislative framework for protecting children and promoting their wellbeing. The child protection system is further supported by operational policies and guidelines, including the Child Safety Practice Manual, which provides practical guidance for staff in implementing the legislative framework.
5. The CP Act establishes that the safety, wellbeing, and best interests of a child, both through childhood and the rest of the child’s life, are paramount (section 5A).


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6. Section 5C outlines the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which prioritises placing children with their family, community, or cultural group wherever possible to maintain their connection to culture and identity.
7. The CP Act provides for the protection of children, promotes the safety of children and supports families to care for children to the extent it is appropriate (section 4).
8. The CP Act (section 5B) provides that a child’s family has the primary responsibility for the child’s upbringing, protection and development and if a child does not have a parent who is able and willing to protect the child, the State is responsible for protecting the child, only taking action that is warranted in the circumstances.
9. The Department, under the authority of the chief executive, exercises statutory powers to determine if a child is in need of protection and ensure the safety of children in need of protection.
10. A child in need of protection is a child who has suffered significant harm, is suffering significant harm, or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm; and does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from the harm (section 10 of the CP Act). Harm is defined under section 9 of the CP Act.
11. Statutory powers under the CP Act include the ability to investigate allegations of harm (section 14), immediately secure a child’s safety (section 18) and apply to the Childrens Court for a temporary assessment order (section 25).
12. The CP Act also provides for the Department to place a child in the care of an approved foster or kinship carer, a licensee or another entity (section 82) and establishes a framework for the regulation of care including carer approvals and licensing of care services (Chapter 4).
13. The child protection process is divided into three key phases: intake, assessment, and ongoing intervention.
14. Intake involves the receipt and recording of concerns about a child’s safety or wellbeing. Anyone can report a concern about a child; however, sections 13E of the CP Act imposes a mandatory reporting obligation on certain professionals who reasonably suspect a child has suffered, is suffering, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering, significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse and does not have a parent able and willing to protect them from harm.

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15. The assessment phase, as provided in section 14 of the CP Act, involves investigating allegations of harm and assessing the child's protective needs to determine whether ongoing intervention is required.
16. Ongoing intervention can involve working with families voluntarily through an intervention with parental agreement (Part 3B of the CP Act) or working with families and children in out-of-home care. All children subject to ongoing intervention have a case plan (Part 3A of the CP Act).
17. Further information regarding the delivery of statutory child protection services across these three phases is detailed in proactive statement number 2 of Victoria Vanhoudt.
18. The Director of Child Protection Litigation (DCPL), established under the Director of *Child Protection Litigation Act 2016* (Qld), is responsible for deciding whether to apply for a child protection order, which type of order and represents the State in proceedings before the Childrens Court of Queensland (section 54 of the CP Act).
19. A child protection order is made by the Childrens Court when it is satisfied that the child is a child is in need of protection and the order is appropriate and desirable for a child's protection, having regard to other considerations as required under section 59 of the CP Act. The operation of the Childrens Court is guided by the *Childrens Court Act 1992* and *Childrens Court Rules 2016*.
20. The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal is authorised to review certain decisions (i.e. 'reviewable decisions') made by the Department. These decisions are outlined in the CP Act, schedule 2, and the *Public Guardian Act 2014*, section 128.
21. Statutory child protection services delivered by the Department operate at the end of a continuum of support for children and families. In addition to departmental service delivery, the Department also funds service providers to assist families and children subject to ongoing intervention including tertiary family intervention services, foster and kinship care services, residential care services and counselling and therapeutic services for children in out-of-home care.
22. Support services for children and families starts with universal services which are predominately provided by Queensland Health (e.g. maternal and child health), the Department of Education (such as early childhood education and care and schools)

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and the Australian Government (e.g. child-care subsidy and income and family support payments).

23. For families who require additional support, secondary and specialist services including family support services, domestic and family violence services, mental health services, drug and alcohol services and housing and homelessness services also support families to safely care for their children.
24. The Queensland child protection system has been shaped by several significant inquiries, including the 1999 Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions (Forde Inquiry); the 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care (CMC Inquiry); and the 2013 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (Carmody Inquiry).
25. These inquiries have highlighted systemic issues and informed reforms, such as the establishment of the Director of Child Protection Litigation and a greater focus on early intervention and family support. Recommendations from subsequent reviews, including the 2017 Queensland Family and Child Commission review of the foster care system, as well as coronial and child death reviews, continue to influence policy and practice.

Data and trends

26. As outlined in the Commission of Inquiry's opening statement, demand for statutory child protection services has increased since the Carmody Inquiry.
27. As at 31 March 2025, the department had received 142,826 **intakes** since 1 April 2024, an increase of 24% since March 2015. This total included 98,643 child concern reports and 44,183 child protection notifications.¹
28. As at 31 March 2025, the Department had recorded 44,183 **assessments** since 1 April 2024, an increase of 96.6% since March 2015. 7,448 substantiations were recorded in the year ending 31 December 2024, up 13.4% from March 2015.
29. As at 31 March 2025, there were 15,582 children subject to **ongoing intervention**, where an assessment has determined that the child is a child in need of protection. Of

¹ Where it is assessed concerns about a child do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention, a child concern report is recorded. Where the concerns are assessed as reaching the threshold, a notification is recorded and the concerns progress to an assessment.


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these children, 2,246 were subject to intervention with parental agreement and 13,336 were subject to a child protection order.

30. As at 31 March 2025, 12,705 were living in out-of-home care. This is a 51.9% increase since March 2015, from 8,362 to 12,705. Of the 12,705 children living in out-of-home care:
- a). 4,328 were residing in foster care; this is a decrease of 0.1% since March 2015;
 - b). 6,119 were residing in kinship care; this is an increase of 82.9% since March 2015;
 - c). 2,258 were residing in residential care; this is an increase of 229% since March 2015. This figure accounts for 17.8% of all placements in out-of-home care.
31. As at 31 March 2025, there were 7,215 children aged 10 to 17 years subject to child protection orders. Of this cohort, 219 children were also subject to youth justice orders, equating to 3%. This is a decrease from 4.2% compared to June 2015.

Disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

32. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families continue to be over-represented in the Queensland child protection system.
33. As at 31 March 2025, there were 7,638 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children subject to ongoing intervention. This is an increase of 56.4% since March 2015.
34. As at 31 March 2025, there were 6,070 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children residing in out-of-home care. This is an increase of 77% since March 2015.

Workforce

35. The department has a budgeted full-time establishment of 4,140 positions. Approximately 87% of these positions are classified as front-line or front-line support.
36. The Queensland Government has committed to increasing the number of front-line child safety officer (CSO) positions by 20% by 2030. As at 30 June 2025, the number of funded CSO positions had increased by 2.13% since 1 November 2024.
37. The role of a CSO is complex and challenging. As at 27 June 2025, the average public service tenure for CSOs was 5.04 years.

38. The permanent separation rate for CSOs for the 12 months July 2024 to June 2025 was 19.21%. This is an improvement when compared to 21.33% for separations between July 2023 and June 2024.

Departmental budget

39. The Director-General is accountable under the *Financial Accountability Act 2023* and the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019* to ensure the Department is managed efficiently and effectively.

40. The 2025-26 budget for operating child safety services is \$2.7 billion, which is comprised of \$2.7 billion controlled and \$15.3 billion administered. The administered budget of \$15.3 billion is inclusive of expenditure relating to the National Redress Scheme for Survivors of Institutional Sexual Abuse.

Safer Children Safer Communities commitments

41. The Queensland Government has made the following commitments to improve Queensland's out-of-home care system:

- a) establishment of a 24hr dual carer supervision model for residential care (by the end of 2030);
- b) a 20% boost to child safety officers;
- c) establishment of a secure care facility for young people with mental health needs who are at risk of harm to themselves (by 2028);
- d) a professional foster care pilot program for children with complex needs;
- e) a \$1500 boost to yearly allowance for each child in out-of-home care for education and extracurricular activities; and
- f) an independent complaints escalation process for complex cases to support families and carers – to be informed by the examination and findings of the Commission of Inquiry.

g) Departmental engagement with the Commission of Inquiry

- 42. Proactive Statement No. 1 is the first proactive statement in a series that aim to provide the Commission of Inquiry with a broad description of the Queensland statutory child protection system.
- 43. The proactive statements in this series include:
 - a) Statutory child protection in Queensland (Proactive Statement No. 2);
 - b) Service delivery of child protection in Queensland (Proactive Statement No. 3);
 - c) Presenting needs of families (Proactive Statement No. 4);
 - d) Out-of-home care system overview (Proactive Statement No. 5);
 - e) Cairns – regional context of service delivery (Proactive Statement No. 6);
 - f) Over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system (Proactive Statement No. 7);
 - g) Complaints (Proactive Statement No. 8);
 - h) Queensland peak bodies (Proactive Statement No. 9);
 - i) Investment and commissioning in Far North Queensland (Proactive Statement No. 10);
 - j) Senior child safety officer (Proactive Statement No. 11); and
 - k) First Nations Collective (Proactive Statement No. 10).

I make this statement of my own free will believing its contents to be true and correct.

Dated this 3rd day of September 2025.

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