

Submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

[REDACTED]

Tuesday 9th September 2025

The Honourable Justice Peter Applegarth AM
Commissioner
Commission of Inquiry into the Queensland Child Protection System
c/o Department of Justice

Dear Commissioner Applegarth,

Re: Submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

Please find enclosed our submission to the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland's Child Protection System. This submission is based on more than a decade of lived experience as a foster carer for [REDACTED] children, predominantly infants and toddlers, together with our professional background in governance, accountability, and reform as a non-executive director on Queensland Government boards and statutory authorities.

For the past [REDACTED] years, we have been the full-time carers of a child with [REDACTED]. This experience has given us profound insight into both the extraordinary potential of Queensland's health and child safety systems, and the systemic failures that create barriers for children and carers. We have worked closely with the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services at [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] Hospital. While we have encountered outstanding staff and medical professionals, we have also faced systemic issues that left us excluded from decision-making, unsupported in navigating court and tribunal processes, and delayed in accessing critical supports such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

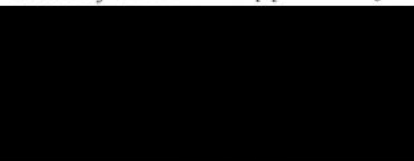
This submission highlights key areas for reform, including:

- **Recognition of carers as central partners in decision-making and court proceedings.**
- **Free, accredited training for carers of children with complex needs.**
- **Stronger coordination between the Department and the NDIS to avoid delays in essential supports.**
- **Financial sustainability reforms, including consideration of taxation measures for foster and permanent carers.**
- **Improved workforce resourcing and caseload management for departmental staff.**
- **Accountability mechanisms to ensure recommendations are not only accepted but implemented in practice.**

This submission does not criticise individual staff, who we have consistently found to be professional, supportive, and overworked. Rather, it highlights systemic shortcomings that prevent the system from functioning in a transparent, child-centred, and sustainable way.

I respectfully submit these reflections in the hope that they will assist the Commission to make practical, evidence-based recommendations that deliver a stronger and more accountable child protection system for Queensland. I would also welcome the opportunity to provide further information or appear before the Commission if that would assist your deliberations.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this vital Inquiry.



Yours sincerely,



Executive Summary

This submission is made to the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland's Child Protection System by carers with over a decade of experience supporting [REDACTED] children in care, predominantly infants and toddlers. For the past [REDACTED] years we have been the full-time carers of a child with [REDACTED]. This experience has provided us with a unique dual perspective: the daily realities of caring for children in the system, and the systemic view that comes from our governance roles on Queensland Government statutory boards and authorities.

Our experience has shown that while Queensland has committed and professional staff, the system itself is constrained by policies, processes, and structural gaps that too often leave carers excluded, children unsupported, and outcomes inconsistent. The issues we raise echo the findings of past reviews, including the Carmody Inquiry, the Coaldrake Review, and the Queensland Productivity Commission, yet remain unresolved in practice. This Inquiry must not only recommend reform but also establish accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation.

Key Insights

- **Transparency and Inclusion:** Carers are frequently excluded from decisions about the children they raise.
- **Complex Needs Support:** Carers of children with disabilities require free, accredited training and practical support.
- **NDIS Delays:** State-Commonwealth coordination must be improved so children in care receive disability supports without delay.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Taxation measures recognising foster and permanent carers should be considered.
- **Workforce Pressures:** Caseload management and resourcing must be addressed.
- **Cultural Responsiveness:** Urgent action is needed to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Recommendations

1. Carer Voice in Decision-Making.
2. Training for Complex Needs.
3. NDIS Coordination.
4. Financial Sustainability.
5. Workforce Resourcing.
6. Cultural Care.
7. Accountability Mechanism.

Section A – Introduction

This submission is made to the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland’s Child Protection System from the perspective of carers with over a decade of experience raising [REDACTED] children through the foster system, predominantly infants and toddlers. Our current care of a child with [REDACTED] has provided us with a profound insight into both the strengths and the systemic shortcomings of Queensland’s child protection framework.

From the outset, our experience has been defined by both extraordinary support and troubling systemic barriers. The [REDACTED] Hospital has provided world-class medical care and oversight, ensuring our child has access to the therapies and interventions that give her the best chance of reaching her potential. At the same time, we have worked closely with the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services – [REDACTED] Service Centre, and with [REDACTED] as our fostering agency. The staff we have encountered have consistently been professional, compassionate, and committed, yet they are clearly overburdened, and the system they operate within constrains their ability to share information openly or to collaborate transparently with carers.

Alongside this lived experience, I bring a professional background in [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The purpose of this submission is to ensure that the Commission has the benefit of both perspectives: the day-to-day realities of caring for children in the system, and the systemic insights into how governance, resourcing, and accountability structures can be reformed to deliver better outcomes. Our experience has highlighted recurring failures in transparency, permanency planning, access to supports, and financial sustainability for carers. These issues are not isolated incidents; they are consistent with the challenges identified in earlier reviews, including the Carmody Inquiry, the Coaldrake Review, and the Queensland Productivity Commission. Too often, recommendations from such reviews have been accepted in principle but not implemented in practice.

We respectfully submit that this Inquiry must be different. It must not only identify reforms but also embed accountability mechanisms to ensure delivery. Without transparency, independent oversight, and structural change, the issues we describe will persist, to the detriment of children, carers, and the integrity of Queensland’s child protection system.

Section B – Systemic Issues in Practice

Our lived experience as carers has provided a clear window into the systemic barriers that undermine Queensland's child protection system. While the professionals we have worked with have often been committed and supportive, the structures, policies, and processes within which they operate too often leave carers excluded, children unsupported, and outcomes inconsistent with the principle of acting in the best interests of the child.

1. Transparency and Communication

The Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services at the [REDACTED] Service Centre has consistently demonstrated professionalism and commitment. Yet staff are heavily constrained in what they can share with carers, particularly in relation to permanency planning, family interactions, and court processes. Despite our long-term care of a child with highly complex needs, we have frequently been left anxious and unable to plan because the Department was unable, or not permitted, to provide clarity. This breakdown in transparency undermines trust and limits the ability of carers to act as effective partners in safeguarding children.

2. Poorly Managed Kinship Transitions

When our child was [REDACTED] months old, we were told [REDACTED] that she would be collected that day for a two-night stay with kin she had never met. Despite our warnings that this was not in her best interests, the placement proceeded. The outcome was predictable: our child was traumatised, the placement failed, and she was returned to us. This incident highlights a systemic issue: the prioritisation of kinship placement as a policy objective, even when it undermines the stability and wellbeing of the child. Carers' expertise, developed through daily care, is undervalued in these decisions, leaving children exposed to unnecessary harm.

3. Exclusion from Court Processes

Our most confronting experience occurred when we attended the Magistrates Court for the Permanent Care Order. We were present, but no one spoke to us, no one acknowledged our role, and no opportunity was provided to advocate for the child's best interests. Despite being her full-time carers since birth, we were invisible in the very forum that would determine her future. The current practice of excluding carers from advocacy in court proceedings is not only appalling; it is inconsistent with the principle of child-centred decision-making and reflects a system that prioritises process over outcomes.

4. Access to Documentation

Even basic administrative processes can become barriers. Obtaining a birth certificate for our child was unnecessarily complex and delayed. For carers, these documents are essential to access services, entitlements, and education. Administrative inefficiencies compound the stress and vulnerability already experienced by carers and create avoidable delays in meeting children's needs.

5. Role of Support Agencies

our fostering agency, has been invaluable in providing training, compliance oversight, and pastoral support. However, they were often excluded from critical information about permanency planning or departmental decision-making. As a result, we increasingly relied on direct contact with the Department for updates, undermining the agency's role as an intermediary. This disconnect reflects a broader systemic failure to integrate agencies into case management, leaving carers caught between fragmented lines of communication.

6. Delays in Accessing the NDIS

The most significant structural gap we encountered was the delay in securing access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Although this is a Commonwealth program, its interface with the state child protection system is critical. In our case, despite clear diagnoses and urgent medical need, access was significantly delayed. Essential therapies were postponed, and we were forced to self-fund or go without support during a critical developmental window. Carers should not be left to bridge this gap alone. The absence of state advocacy mechanisms to expedite NDIS access for children in care is a systemic failure with lifelong consequences for children with disabilities.

7. Financial and Emotional Burden on Carers

The level of care required for a child with complex needs is exhaustive, feeding therapies, medical appointments, physical therapy, developmental exercises, and emotional regulation. Meeting these needs required my wife to leave her career and dedicate herself to full-time care. While allowances exist, they are insufficient to cover the true cost of care, leaving families under sustained financial pressure. Without reform, this model is not economically sustainable, and the system risks losing committed carers who cannot bear the financial burden long term.

Summary

These experiences are not isolated anomalies but symptoms of systemic shortcomings:

- **A lack of transparency that leaves carers disempowered.**
- **A prioritisation of process (kinship and court structures) over child-centred outcomes.**
- **Fragmentation between the Department and agencies like [REDACTED]**
- **Inefficiencies in basic administration.**
- **Failure to coordinate with Commonwealth systems such as the NDIS.**
- **Financial frameworks that undervalue carers' contributions and sacrifice.**

Together, they reveal a system that too often treats carers as peripheral, children's best interests as secondary to process, and outcomes as incidental to compliance. Reform is needed to realign the system to its purpose: protecting and supporting children by empowering those who care for them every day.

Section C – Permanency Planning and Long-Term Stability

Permanency is the cornerstone of a child's security and wellbeing. For children in care, permanency is not simply a legal milestone; it is the promise of stability, attachment, and continuity of support.

Yet our experience demonstrates that Queensland's permanency framework often fails to deliver on this promise. It is undermined by systemic delays, a lack of transparency, and a prioritisation of process over the best interests of the child.

1. Prioritisation of Kinship over Stability

While kinship care is an important principle, its application has at times been rigid and detrimental. In our case, despite being the full-time carers of our child since birth, we experienced decisions that placed the pursuit of kinship ahead of her established attachments and wellbeing. [REDACTED]

This decision, made without meaningful consultation with us, caused distress, disrupted her stability, and ultimately failed. This experience reflects a systemic issue: the pursuit of kinship as a policy preference over the practical realities of a child's emotional and developmental needs. Permanency must be about stability, not box-ticking compliance.

2. Lack of Transparency in Permanency Processes

We were advised, often late and without context, that our child's case was progressing toward a Permanent Care Order. Yet we were given little explanation of what this meant, how the process would unfold, or our role within it. [REDACTED] our fostering agency, were also unaware of the details and unable to provide guidance. This left us reliant on fragmented updates from the Department, and in many cases we learned of decisions only after the fact.

For carers to commit to permanency, the process must be transparent, predictable, and inclusive. Anything less undermines confidence and discourages families from stepping forward as permanent carers.

3. Permanency and the NDIS

For a child with complex disabilities, permanency cannot be separated from disability support. Our child's [REDACTED] means she will require lifelong therapies, equipment, and interventions. Yet access to the NDIS was significantly delayed, leaving us without critical supports in her early life. Permanency, in such circumstances, becomes hollow if it is not matched by guaranteed access to disability funding. State and Commonwealth systems must work in tandem to ensure that children in care with disabilities receive timely, seamless access to the NDIS. Without this, permanency orders are legal in form but fragile in practice.

4. Economic Sustainability of Permanency

Sustaining permanency requires not only emotional commitment but also financial capacity. In our case, my wife left her career to care full-time for our child. This was not a choice but a necessity given the intensity of her needs. Current allowances do not cover the real costs of long-term complex care, leaving families like ours to bear the economic burden. This creates a systemic risk: permanency will not be sustainable if carers are forced to choose between financial survival and providing care.

Taxation reform, such as introducing offsets or deductions for verified care-related expenses, should be explored alongside allowance reform to create a framework that genuinely supports permanent carers.

Summary

Permanency should mean more than a court order. It should guarantee stability, attachment, and sustainable support. Yet in practice, permanency in Queensland is undermined by:

- **Policy-driven prioritisation of kinship over stability and attachment.**
- **A lack of transparency and communication with carers.**
- **Delays and gaps in accessing the NDIS, leaving children unsupported.**
- **Inadequate financial frameworks that make long-term care unsustainable.**

For children like ours, permanency requires reform that integrates legal stability with practical supports, disability funding, financial sustainability, and recognition of carers as central partners. Without this, permanency risks becoming rhetoric rather than reality.

Section D – Supports for Carers

Caring for children in the child safety system is demanding work that requires emotional resilience, financial sacrifice, and, in many cases, specialised skills. Yet the current support framework for carers is insufficient. While agencies and departmental staff provide encouragement and oversight, systemic gaps in training, financial recognition, and integration with other services undermine the sustainability of care.

1. Training and Preparation for Complex Needs

When our child came into our care directly from the maternity unit, we were unprepared for the complexity of her needs. [REDACTED] feeding difficulties, and developmental delays required daily therapies, intensive supervision, and careful planning. Yet no training or preparation was provided specific to these challenges. We had to learn reactively, relying on the expertise of the [REDACTED] Hospital and our own resourcefulness. This is not acceptable.

Carers must be provided with free, accredited training tailored to the needs of children with disabilities, trauma, and other complex conditions. Such training should be embedded into the foster care framework, delivered in partnership with health and education systems, and available on an ongoing basis. Carers cannot be expected to shoulder clinical or therapeutic responsibilities without structured preparation.

2. Financial Pressures and Sustainability

Sustaining care for children with complex needs often requires carers to restructure their lives. In our case, my wife left her career to provide full-time care. While allowances exist, they are inadequate to meet the true costs of long-term care, particularly when factoring in therapies, equipment, transport, and lost income. For many carers, this financial burden is unsustainable, creating a risk of placement breakdowns or carers leaving the system altogether.

Financial reform must address both allowances and taxation. Taxation measures, such as a Foster Carer Tax Offset, deductions for verified care-related expenses, or income-averaging provisions, should be introduced at the Commonwealth level. Recognising foster and permanent care in the tax system would reflect the real economic contribution carers make and create a framework that supports permanency, rather than undermines it.

3. Navigating the NDIS

The NDIS, while vital, remains a source of stress for carers. Delays in access and a lack of state advocacy leave carers to manage complex, bureaucratic processes alone. In our case, months of delay meant our child missed critical early therapies.

Carers require structured support to navigate the NDIS, ideally through dedicated departmental liaison officers who can advocate, escalate, and ensure children in care receive timely disability supports.

Without such mechanisms, the burden continues to fall unfairly on carers.

4. Role of Agencies

██████████ has provided valuable training, compliance oversight, and pastoral care. However, they were frequently excluded from critical information about permanency planning or departmental decision-making. This limited their ability to support us and left us reliant on direct engagement with the Department. This lack of integration reflects a broader systemic problem: agencies and departments are too often siloed, leaving carers caught between them. Reform should mandate integrated communication protocols and shared access to case planning information.

5. Peer and Emotional Support

Carers often feel isolated. While agencies provide some contact, there are limited structured opportunities to connect with peers who understand the challenges of raising children in care, particularly those with complex needs. Isolation contributes to burnout and attrition. A stronger peer support network, supported by the Department and agencies, should be established to provide mentorship, shared learning, and emotional resilience for carers.

6. Workforce Conditions for Departmental Staff

The sustainability of care is inseparable from the sustainability of the workforce. At ██████████ we have consistently encountered dedicated, compassionate staff, but they are overworked and constrained by high caseloads. This prevents them from working in a transparent, child-centred way. Reform must address workforce pressures by introducing caseload caps, recruitment targets, and trauma-informed training. Supporting staff to succeed is essential if carers and children are to be properly supported.

Summary

The current framework of support for carers is insufficient to meet the demands placed upon them. Reform must ensure:

- **Free, accredited training for carers of children with complex needs.**
- **Financial reform, including allowances and taxation recognition.**
- **Dedicated advocacy and liaison for NDIS navigation.**
- **Integrated communication between agencies and the Department.**
- **Structured peer networks and emotional support for carers.**
- **Caseload management and workforce investment for departmental staff.**

Carers cannot provide stability if they are underprepared, undervalued, and unsupported. For permanency to succeed, carers must be equipped and sustained as central partners in the child safety system.

Section E – Opportunities for Reform and Conclusion

The experiences outlined in this submission reflect more than the challenges of one family; they expose systemic shortcomings that undermine the effectiveness, transparency, and sustainability of Queensland’s child protection system.

While we have encountered exceptional professionals, particularly at the [REDACTED] Hospital and within the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services at [REDACTED] their efforts are constrained by structures, policies, and resource limitations that prevent the system from functioning as a transparent, child-centred framework.

The Commission now has the opportunity to not only recommend reforms but to ensure they are implemented in practice. History has shown that Queensland has a pattern of accepting recommendations in principle while failing to deliver meaningful change in implementation.

Without independent oversight and accountability, the issues described here will persist.

Opportunities for Reform

1. Carer Voice in Decision-Making and Courts

- Mandate recognition of carers as parties with the right to be heard in permanency proceedings and child protection matters.
- Introduce mechanisms for carers to provide evidence directly to courts and tribunals, ensuring decisions are informed by those who know the child best.

2. Training for Complex Needs

- Establish free, accredited, and mandatory training programs for carers supporting children with disabilities, trauma, or other complex needs.
- Partner with hospitals, allied health services, and universities to deliver specialist modules, ensuring carers are properly equipped.

3. NDIS Coordination

- Develop a joint protocol between the Department of Child Safety and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to fast-track applications for children in care.
- Introduce dedicated departmental liaison officers to advocate and escalate NDIS access for children with complex needs.

4. Financial Sustainability and Taxation Reform

- Reform allowances to better reflect the true cost of raising children with complex needs.
- Introduce a Foster Carer Tax Offset or equivalent deductions for verified care-related expenses, recognising the economic contribution of carers and ensuring permanency is financially viable.

5. Workforce Resourcing

- Implement caseload caps for child safety officers to enable transparent, child-centred case management.
- Expand recruitment and retention programs for staff, with ongoing trauma-informed training and professional support.

6. Agency Integration and Communication

- Mandate integrated communication protocols between the Department and fostering agencies such as [REDACTED]
- Ensure agencies are included in permanency planning and provided with timely case information to support carers effectively.

7. Peer and Emotional Support for Carers

- Establish state-supported peer networks and mentoring programs for carers, particularly those supporting children with complex needs.
- Provide access to trauma-informed counselling and respite services to reduce carer burnout.

8. Cultural Responsiveness

- Strengthen cultural care planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care, ensuring connections to culture and community are prioritised.
- Align reforms with Closing the Gap targets and ensure carers are supported with culturally appropriate training and resources.

9. Accountability and Implementation

- Establish an independent Child Safety Reform Implementation Office to monitor, report, and publicly account for the delivery of this Inquiry's recommendations.
- Ensure regular reporting to Parliament and to the community, with transparency on progress and outcomes.

Conclusion

The Queensland child protection system is defined by contradiction. On one hand, it contains dedicated professionals and agencies striving to do their best under immense pressure. On the other, it is constrained by systemic barriers that exclude carers, delay support, and place process above the best interests of children.

Our journey, raising █████ children in care, including █████ █████ has shown both the potential of the system and its persistent failures. Permanency, transparency, and sustainability cannot remain aspirations; they must become lived realities for every child in care.

We urge the Commission to ensure that its recommendations are not only ambitious but also enforceable, with mechanisms in place to guarantee delivery. Without accountability, this Inquiry risks becoming another report on a shelf.

With it, Queensland has the opportunity to create a child protection system that genuinely places children first and empowers carers as essential partners in their lives.