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Commission of Inquiry  
Child Safety System  
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*Sisters Inside Inc. is an independent community organisation which exists to advocate for the human rights of women in the criminal justice system*

Dear Commission

Submission to the Child Safety Commission of Inquiry - Corporate parenting and the link between the child safety and youth justice systems

### *Introduction*

Sisters Inside makes this submission to the Commission of Inquiry into the Child Safety System in relation to the Department's role as "corporate parent" and the relationship between the family policing system<sup>1</sup> and youth justice systems. Our submission builds upon and draws on evidence provided in our previously submitted 2025 report, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland.'

This submission is written from the standpoint of lived experience and decades of community work alongside criminalised women and girls, many of whom were first criminalised as children, who came through state placement<sup>2</sup>, and were taken from their families under a system that continues the project of colonisation.

We do not accept the framing that this is a technical problem requiring better "coordination," better "communication," or better "information sharing." The scale and consistency of harm makes one thing clear: the family policing system is not a protection system. It is a removal and containment system.

*Corporate parenting in Queensland is a lie: the Department is not a parent, it is an authority*  
The Department calls itself a corporate parent. In reality, it functions as a corporate manager of risk, liability and public perception.

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<sup>1</sup> What is often referred to as Queensland's "child safety" system is, in reality, a system of family policing. It does not exist to support families or keep children safe in any holistic, culturally grounded or trauma-informed way. Instead, it operates through surveillance, coercion, and the removal of children, especially from poor families, Aboriginal families, Torres Strait Islander families, and families already harmed by colonisation, racism, state violence, and poverty. These are not accidents or anomalies; they are the predictable outcomes of a system designed to control, punish, and fracture families, not to support or heal them.

<sup>2</sup> We use the term state placement instead of out-of-home care to reject the system's sanitising and misleading language. The phrase out-of-home care implies that children are being "cared for" in a safe and supportive environment, when in reality many are placed in institutions, residential facilities, or with strangers under state control. These placements are the result of forced separation from family, culture, and community, and often replicate carceral conditions. By using state placement, we centre the reality that these are forms of state custody, not neutral acts of care, and we resist language that conceals the violence and surveillance inherent in the family policing system.

A parent's duty is to love, nurture, stabilise, protect, and keep a child connected to their family, identity and culture. The Department does not behave like a parent. It behaves like a government agency doing what governments always do: control, contain, and punish the poor and the colonised.

*"I dropped out of grade five was because I've been expelled from every school I'd ever been to. They could put me in behavioural schools, like Flexi schools. I think I had already been in 15 or 16 different schools at this point, and just nobody was listening. So they're all sitting there like, oh, you know, she's a bad kid. She's this, she's that. When it's like, no, I just need attention and somebody to love me."<sup>3</sup>*

If the Department were held to the standards it imposes on families, it would be disqualified from parenting immediately. The Department is not just "ineffective" at parenting. It is actively harmful. It repeatedly creates the conditions in which children's lives unravel and then labels those children as the problem.

### *State Placement operates as a feeder system into youth justice*

*"There were times I'd get out of the detention centre, say it was five o'clock in the afternoon, right? I'd get released, walk down to Wacol train station, and use the payphone to ring the carers and ask them to come and get me. They'd refuse. Mind you, I was let out on curfew. But still, they'd refuse to come.*

*So, I'd catch the train from Wacol into the city, and by the time I'd get there and try to figure out a bus or a train to wherever I was supposed to go, it'd be close to curfew. I'd call them again, and they'd still refuse to come get me. But then, the moment it hits seven o'clock, they'd call the police on me and tell them I've breached my curfew. So, I'd get sent straight back."<sup>4</sup>*

The inquiry asks whether elements of the family policing system operate as a "feeder system" into youth justice. We answer: Yes. Not by accident, by design.

The Department is not a neutral bystander watching vulnerable children fall through the cracks. It is a primary architect of those cracks.

Removal from family and Country, placement instability, residential care, surveillance, school disruption, untreated trauma, sexual violence, physical abuse, and constant state control do not "increase risk." They produce it.

*"I remember one of the carers. He really didn't like me. I remember he scratched his car. He had a real nice Commodore. Anyway, he pulled up to work and then tried to claim that I was the one that scratched his car. Mind you, I never touched his [REDACTED] car. You know, he came with the [REDACTED] scratch on it, but because his car was scratched, and he must have needed a police report to claim insurance, he told them that I had done it. And so, I had been charged for that as well. And because I was out on, what was I out on? Probably a conditional release order. Yeah, they sent me straight back inside, and I didn't even do nothing wrong."<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland'

<sup>4</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland'

<sup>5</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland'

The Department then pretends this is the child's personal failing, or a "complex needs" issue, or a workforce capacity problem. But this is predictable state-made harm, and it is repeated generation after generation.

*Residential care is not care, it is a site of harm, containment and criminalisation*

*"I think it's more just a home for them to put the kids into so they can state that they're doing their job. I don't think anyone really cares about how you being treated or how you're feeling."<sup>6</sup>*

The inquiry specifically asks about children placed in residential care. We say plainly: residential care is one of the most dangerous places the state puts children.

*"One night I got █████ flogged, like, real bad. I believe that's one of the nights that he dropped me off at the cemetery. That night I had a little photo frame with my mum's photo in it with me, um, a Little Mermaid photo frame. So, I remember just crying, holding the photo frame, going to sleep, wondering, you know, why my mum didn't love me."<sup>7</sup>*

Residential care in Queensland is routinely experienced as:

- instability dressed up as "placements"
- punishment dressed up as "behavioural response"
- surveillance dressed up as "support"
- coercion dressed up as "safety"
- police call-outs dressed up as "incident management"

Children in residential care are treated as liabilities. They are watched, recorded, managed, escalated, and handed to police. The state manufactures "offending" by turning everyday childhood distress and survival behaviour into criminal events.

This is particularly true for Aboriginal children, whose grief and resistance is never interpreted as a rational response to dispossession and removal, it is read as defiance. Aboriginal children are not treated as children. They are treated as threats.

*"They lock the doors if they don't want you to abscond, and you're known to just leave the property whenever you want. I remember there was one time where the door was unlocked, and I had opened the door and walked down the corridor. They was trying to shut the door on me, like to keep me inside, and I had pushed it open, and when I pushed it open, I quickly got out. But I went to slam the door behind me, and I didn't realise her fingers were in the door, because she's standing there like a █████ deer, trying to make me not leave. So, her fingers got smashed by the door, and so she charged me with assault."<sup>8</sup>*

*The Department is a woeful substitute parent, and an expert at blaming the child*

The Department's greatest skill is not protection. It is narrative control.

It creates a story where:

- a child is "high risk"
- a child is "violent"

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<sup>6</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland'

<sup>7</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland'

<sup>8</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, 'State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland'

- a child is “unmanageable”
- a child is “non-compliant”
- a child “won’t engage”

That language is not accidental. It performs a function. It shifts responsibility away from state violence and onto the child.

*“The amount of times I went into Child Safety going the [redacted] off, I don’t know how many times they used to lock their doors on me and wouldn’t let me in, and then they’d just call the police. But it’s like, I’m going off because nobody’s listening to me. Like, I’m trying to tell you. I’m a kid, but I’m not going to explain it to you or talk to you the way you want me to, because I don’t understand how to talk like that. I wasn’t raised like that. I wasn’t taught that. So, you’re expecting a lot from me. They’d say, ‘If you ring up demanding’- like, what the [redacted] does that even mean? Brother, I went to grade five. I don’t know what demanding means. I can’t even get on the [redacted] laptop to look the word up, because they locked that [redacted] up too. Like, what do you mean demanding?”<sup>9</sup>*

It is the language of carcerality, used to justify escalation, exclusion, and punishment, and when a child is harmed under state responsibility, the public is given the same excuse every time: “we did our best,” “they were complex,” “we couldn’t find a placement,” “they absconded,” “they refused support.” That is not parenting. That is abandonment with paperwork.

*Dual-order children are being processed through two violent systems at once*

The inquiry asks about young people “known to both” systems and the experiences of government agencies dealing with “dual order” so called “youth offenders.”

The truth is that for dual-order children, the state has decided they are better governed through force than through care.

Children are simultaneously:

- controlled as “wards”
- disciplined as “offenders”

This is an explicit demonstration that corporate parenting is a fiction. Because no parent hands their child to a jailer and calls it love.

Dual-order children are the clearest evidence that the family policing system has become a conveyor belt into youth justice. They are proof that the Department’s intervention does not prevent harm, it escalates it.

*Transitions out of detention are a second abandonment*

The inquiry also asks about children transitioning out of detention into care, and care into adulthood .

This is where the state’s cruelty becomes undeniable.

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<sup>9</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, ‘State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland’

Children exit detention with trauma, institutionalisation, isolation, and often immediate housing instability. Many are released into:

- unstable placements
- residential care arrangements that cannot meet their needs
- homelessness
- adult systems that treat them as disposable

For many, “transition” is just another word for release into nothing.

The state creates children who are hyper-surveilled and under-loved and then acts surprised when they end up criminalised again. This cycle is not a tragedy. It is policy.

*The “community impact” framing is political cover for punishment*

The inquiry invites discussion of experiences of community members “negatively affected” by children in residential care, and victims of crime where the young person was in care .

Sisters Inside is not indifferent to harm. We know violence harms people. We know communities deserve safety. But we refuse the way this framing is repeatedly used: as a moral panic lever to justify more policing, harsher sentencing, more youth imprisonment, more punitive laws, and more public hatred toward children the state itself has harmed.

When the Department removes children, destabilises them, warehouse them in residential care, calls police on them, excludes them from school, and isolates them from culture and community, then the Department owns the consequences.

The state cannot manufacture harm and then use that harm to justify more punishment.

*Aboriginal children are being stolen again, this is a continuation of the Stolen Generation*

*“We are not experiencing a child protection crisis. We are experiencing a continuation of colonisation.”<sup>10</sup>*

We want to be absolutely clear: Aboriginal children are still being removed at catastrophic rates, and the outcomes are still dispossession, trauma, and criminalisation.

This inquiry must not pretend this is merely a “service system” problem.

It is the continuation of a colonial project:

- remove Aboriginal children
- break kinship and culture
- discipline the family through poverty policing
- contain the child in state institutions
- criminalise the child when they react
- build industries and jobs around that containment
- pretend it is protection

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<sup>10</sup> Sisters Inside Report 2025, ‘State Controlled Childhood: The Business of Family Policing in Queensland’

That is the truth of corporate parenting in Queensland. And when those children grow up into prisons, the state and its contracted services create another industry: corrections, programs, case management, risk assessment, parole, re-entry, monitoring.

The state creates the damage and then profits from managing it.

*The government is responsible for this pipeline*

The inquiry asks: what are the factors contributing to children in care entering the “youth justice” system? The factor is the state.

The factor is:

- removal as default intervention
- residential care as punishment placement
- policing as behaviour management
- underfunding and outsourcing of care
- cultural safety treated as optional
- schooling disrupted, then blamed on the child
- disability support denied, then used against the child
- trauma created, then pathologised
- criminalisation used as “structure”

The Department cannot claim to be a parent while repeatedly delivering children into police hands. It cannot claim to protect children while delivering them into cells.

*What would a real corporate parent do?*

If the Department was genuinely a parent acting in a child’s best interests, it would:

- stop removals as a first response and prioritise family preservation
- fully resource Aboriginal community-controlled solutions
- end reliance on residential care as a placement model
- stop calling police as behaviour management for children
- ensure children leaving prison have stable housing, connection, and support
- guarantee education continuity and disability supports
- treat trauma as a predictable outcome of state violence, not a child’s moral defect
- stop blaming children for surviving what the state did to them

A parent does not “manage risk.” A parent makes a child safe.

*Conclusion*

This inquiry must not become another performance where government departments admit “challenges,” promise “reforms,” and continue the same practices under new language.

The Department is not an effective corporate parent. It is a dangerous one.

The family policing is not separate from “youth justice.” It is one of the primary mechanisms through which Queensland produces criminalised children, especially Aboriginal children, and then punishes them for being harmed.

This is not dysfunction. This is the architecture of colonial governance.  
And it must end.

Yours sincerely



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