



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED: 10.45am, Wednesday 3 April 2013

Hawkesbury and St Marys child protection workers hold stop work meeting over ongoing resource shortage

Community Services staff at the Hawkesbury office have held a stop walk meeting during a visit by Minister for Community Services Pru Goward this morning, in protest at understaffing and a lack of resources, according to the Public Service Association of NSW.

The St Marys office is expected to hold a stop work meeting later today highlighting the same concerns.

*The Report of Reviewable Deaths in 2010 and 2011*¹ released by the NSW Ombudsman last week confirmed staff concerns about a lack of resources compromising outcomes for children at risk.

The Ombudsman said in a media statement, "This report, as with others before it, again highlights a lack of capacity within Community Services in the time period leading up to these deaths to respond to children at risk of significant harm.

"In some cases, families had been the subject of frequent reports. We found that risk was not adequately assessed, or not assessed at all because of competing priorities and gaps in casework."²

Assistant Secretary Steve Turner said community services staff across NSW were frustrated that cost cutting was severely hampering the ability for effective child protection in the state.

"It's a shocking failure of this State Government when the Ombudsman finds two-thirds of the families of vulnerable children who died in 2010-11 had a child protection history," Mr Turner said.

"As the Ombudsman's report shows, there are too many serious cases with not enough caseworkers and support staff to respond.

"Job cuts, a lack of resources and a freeze on recruitment have created a crisis in the NSW Community Services Department.

"Staff find themselves overwhelmed by insufficient resources and a high administration burden that stops them from essential face-to-face work with vulnerable children and their families.

"Our members report a vacancy rate as high as 50% in the Hawkesbury office – you can't hope to get your job done when you're understaffed to that extent.

"We call for Minister Goward to reveal her plan to urgently ensure not one more child at risk falls through the safety net due to a lack of staff and resources," Mr Turner said.

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¹ <http://bit.ly/Zxi5Bt>

² <http://bit.ly/17ae65p>