

Public Service Association of New South Wales

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In reply please quote: ST:MG

26 February, 2015

The Hon. Gabrielle Upton, MP
Minister for Family and Community Services
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Minister,

I write to you regarding the chronic under-resourcing of the state's child protection services and, in particular, the growing number of at-risk children still not being seen by a child protection case worker.

The latest *Community Services Caseworker* dashboard figures (September 2014) show that nearly 55,000 children reported as being at risk of **significant** harm (ROSH) failed to receive a face-to-face response from a child protection caseworker. In fact nearly three-quarters of NSW children subject to a ROSH report go without a completed face-to-face child protection response assessment. In some parts of the state that figure is as high as 84%.

You would appreciate that following the *Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW* (2009), the reporting threshold was raised from risk of harm to risk of significant harm. The fundamental reason for this change was to reduce the number of reports referred to Community Services to enable the agency to better respond to the most serious incidents.

In addition to this, the Inquiry recommended shifting responsibility for Out of Home Care (OOHC) services to the non-government sector to allow Community Services to focus its resources on its statutory functions

As you would be aware, we opposed these changes, arguing the non-government sector lacked capacity and the money would be better spent improving existing public sector delivery.

On election to office in March 2011 your Government adopted this recommendation, and in December 2011 announced plans to transfer all OOHC services to the non-government sector by 2017. Despite considerable public investment - in terms of money, expertise and resources - the success of the transition remains deeply uncertain, an enormous drain on the agency's resources and have not delivered significant improvements in child protection outcomes.

More than five years after the Inquiry, it is now evident is that our state's child protection system remains overwhelmed.

The PSA members working in Community Services have a great deal of experience and can provide good background information to you on what is needed to best resource child protection and the actions that need to be taken to improve operations for working with children. We believe it would be very constructive for all of us if we were to meet to discuss working together towards this outcome.

The issues that we believe are very important to discuss are:

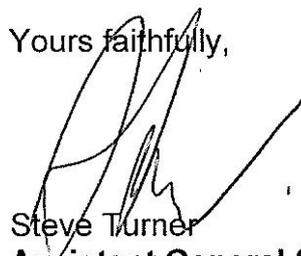
- The further privatisation of out of home care (and how the current moves have not worked);
- The outsourcing of Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) to the NGO Sector;
- Staffing; and
- IT systems within Community Services.

Pressures from the above issues are placing a great strain on our members within Community Services, which is placing staff at risk and if not corrected may have an impact on child protection in NSW.

An urgent meeting with yourself would be a significant step forward in allaying the concerns of the membership, and will signal that the government is committed to child protection and to supporting the staff responsible for this role in NSW.

Please contact my office to arrange a meeting.

Yours faithfully,



Steve Turner
Assistant General Secretary