

Out of Home Care reviews and home safety checks

The PSA was very concerned about the recent Ministerial direction to complete Out of Home Care visiting and safety checks for all children in statutory OOHC over a very limited timeframe of 42 days.

Members were concerned that they were required to complete a list of important tasks over an impossible timeframe. There was further concern that this would place children subject to ROSH at risk due to an inability to receive an appropriate response, as caseworker resources would be diverted. Additionally, a significant number of OOHC Caseworkers would not be available as they were undertaking OOHC transition and OCG accreditation work.

Steve Turner, Acting PSA General Secretary, immediately contacted Minister Hazard's office, the source, we were advised, of the direction and a constructive discussion occurred. This led to a series of further discussions with Deidre Mulkerin, Deputy Secretary (Western) which culminated in a meeting with Deidre. Steve Turner, with delegates Brendan McMenamin and Heather Shields, raised our concerns about the two most important issues arising from this direction:

- lack of resources to conduct the audit; and
- the impossible timeframe.

Deidre Mulkerin made it clear that District Directors had been informed that resources should be allocated as required by the district to assist in the successful completion of the project and that there would be no negative outcomes should they allocate extra resources, including the use of overtime, the hiring of extra staff or outsourcing some or all of the process to appropriate organisations e.g. "Assessments Australia".

It was recognised that the timeframe was very strict. It was further recognised by the Secretary of Community Services and the Minister that it might not be possible to complete all checks within that time and whilst best endeavours should be made to meet the timeframe, if it is not completed, then a plan to finalise reviews should be put forward.

Finally, there will be a review at the halfway point to see how the audit is progressing and to identify what might be needed to support staff to complete the audit.

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