

Public Service Association of New South Wales

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In reply please quote: TP:MG

30th November, 2016

Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter
Secretary
Department of Family and Community Services
Level 11, 234 Sussex St
Sydney NSW 2000

By email: Petra.Kathagen@facs.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Coutts-Trotter,

I write to you on behalf of the Public Service Association of NSW (the Association) and refer to a recent meeting with you in which we raised concerns relating to caseloads in Community Services.

I understand the Association presented you with a number of examples of caseworkers in parts of western Sydney carrying more than 20 cases, which you agreed was excessive.

We believe the problem is more wide spread and a comprehensive audit of caseloads is needed to better understand and address the resourcing pressures faced by your agency.

The recent Legislative Council inquiry into child protection in NSW noted that there had been a 40% increase in Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) reports to Community Services in the last 4 years, but no additional increase in caseworker numbers to match the increase in demand. In fact, according to recent media reports the number of caseworker roles has declined.

A recent survey of caseworkers conducted by the Association found that a majority of respondents work unpaid overtime as they struggle to manage excessive workloads. Case Work Managers have contacted the Association to complain that they have been threatened with disciplinary action unless they allocated excessive and unsustainable caseloads to their staff to meet arbitrary productivity targets set by your agency.

We believe the chronic under resourcing of case work has created an unsafe work environment which needs to be understood and properly addressed by your agency. We believe the evidence – excessive caseloads, a high level of workers' compensation claims, a high number of employee grievances and bullying complaints, the high level use of sick leave and caseworker turnover –

overwhelmingly supports the need for action. In the interests of the safety, of both case work staff and the vulnerable children they seek to protect, I once again reiterate our call for a comprehensive audit of caseloads as an initial step in confronting and tackling the resourcing crisis faced by Community Services.

The Association looks forward to further discussions and consultation with Family and Community Services once the results of the audit are available.

Your faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Troy Wright', written in a cursive style.

Troy Wright
Assistant General Secretary