



17 March 2017

FACS

Legislative Council report

Child protection

The long awaited Legislative Council Report into NSW's child protection system was released by the Chair of the General Purpose Standing Committee 2 on 16 March 2017.

The report contains 28 recommendations and can be viewed [HERE](#)

(<http://psa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CP-Report-recommendations.pdf>)

One of the strengths of the report is that the Committee heard the evidence from the PSA and caseworkers about unsustainable workloads and the serious work, health and safety issues they confront on a daily basis with little or no support from management.

The report refers to the union highlighting "the negative impact being experienced in FACS including high amounts of sick leave, increased workers compensation claims and increased cases of vicarious and secondary trauma". View the extract from the report [HERE](#).

(<http://psa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Report-extract.pdf>)

Key recommendations include:

Recommendation 19

That the Department of Family and Community Services, in consultation with the Public Service Association and staff, set caseload targets for caseworkers taking into account the complex nature of childcare work.

Recommendation 20

That the Department of Family and Community Services, in consultation with the Public Service Association, change workplace system to improve the health, safety and well-being of its staff, given the challenging nature of child protection work.

Recommendation 23

That the Department of Family and Community Services develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a broader workforce training and development framework for staff working with vulnerable children, young people and families.

The PSA welcomes recommendations 20 and 23 and notes recommendation 19 in relation to setting caseload targets. This cannot begin to be addressed without better resourcing and significant changes in workplace culture in FACS. The PSA will be writing to Minister Goward in regard to the proposed consultative framework and will impress upon her the importance of taking immediate action to address the health and safety concerns identified in the Report.

These recommendations present an opportunity to turn around several years of failure by FACS to adequately safeguard the health and well-being of its frontline staff, who

day in day out confront difficult and threatening situations when carrying out their specialist role and statutory child protection function.

These recommendations also highlight the importance of caseworkers continuing to use the workload planner. No discussion about Recommendation 19 can take place without recognising the primacy of this tool to support caseworkers.

The report also contains a number of negatives. Significantly, the Committee failed to make any recommendations to wind back the privatisation of Out of Home Care. Instead there is a focus on improving contract management, and improved auditing, monitoring and oversight. While these factors are important, the Committee avoided the most pressing and contentious issue.

The PSA notes with serious concern the dissenting statement provided by Committee member and Liberal MLC Dr Peter Phelps on pages 222-223 of the Report. He argues:

It is a common fallacy that with “just a bit more money”, “a few more resources”, “a bit more service coordination”, “a fraction more goodwill”, that Government can solve any social problem. It cannot. In fact, governments are particularly bad at solving social problems, and generally any action they undertake only exacerbates foundational problems.

Dr Phelps’ statement ends with the following recommendation:

That the Department of Family and Community Services be abolished in its entirety, and all legislation and regulations that it administers be repealed.

Given the O’Farrell, Baird and Berejiklian Governments’ ideological obsession with privatisation we have legitimate concerns about continued attacks on publicly provided child protection services. Dr Phelps’ dissenting recommendation needs to be immediately ruled out by the Premier and the PSA will be seeking this undertaking as a matter of urgency.

The State Government’s response to the Child Protection Report is due on 18 September 2017. Members can be assured the PSA will continue to take the fight up to the Coalition Government to protect the health and safety of caseworkers, provide increased resources to protect vulnerable children and young people and recognise the value and expertise of the public sector. We will not allow such key issues facing us as a community to fall off the Government’s agenda.

The full report is available [HERE](#).

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/Inquiry/TOR/2396/Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20GPSC%20No%202%20-%20Inquiry%20into%20Child%20Protection.pdf>

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<https://membership.psa.asn.au/>

