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Kids put in same motels as crims

EXCLUSIVE

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CHILDREN and babies who have been removed from dangerous situations by the government are being put up in the same motels used as emergency accommodation for criminals on parole.

The revelations have forced Family and Community Services Minister Pru Goward to order her department to find alternatives, describing the use of motels as "unacceptable".

However, Ms Goward has stopped short of endorsing calls by the Public Service Association to establish government-funded shelters.

"The decades-long practice of utilising motels and serviced apartments needs to end. It is unacceptable for children," she said. "I have instructed the department to present me with alternative solutions but ... there will be no more boys' homes or female factories.

"Children in care need permanency and a safe home for life," Ms Goward said.

The comments come ahead of Child Protection Week this week, with NSW Family and Community Services workers to stage a protest march.

Departmental figures reveal there were 142 children, who were removed from their families because of the risk of significant harm or while waiting for a foster home, being housed in motels, hotels or caravan parks last month.

FACS caseworkers revealed some of the children were being housed in the same motels used by Housing NSW for its clients, which

includes domestic violence victims "and parolees".

Some children were living in motels for more than a year and one three-month-old baby was in a motel for a week.

At the same time, the state government is outsourcing the "babysitting" to the private sector by contracting youth workers to supervise children in temporary care.

The Sunday Telegraph spoke to the managers of two Sydney motels on the FACS and Housing NSW motel lists on Friday, with both confirming children and parolees had been accommodated.

"We have children staying here with adults, but I don't know who they are," he said.

"We have people from prison, but only for one or two days. They are well-behaved and quiet. We don't have any trouble."

PSA assistant general secretary Troy Wright said not only was motel accommodation inappropriate, the use of private contractors was unacceptable.

"Children are being removed from situations of risk every week across NSW and placed in completely unsuitable, insecure and potentially dangerous accommodation," Mr Wright said.

"These children have often already experienced significant trauma — they should never be housed and supervised by an unskilled, transient and unaccountable glorified babysitting service motivated by profit."

A caseworker, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the number of children being placed in motels had "exploded" in the past three years.