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‘ChildStory’ a horror story for child protection system

A new Community Services case management and records system, ‘ChildStory’, has placed children at risk of harm over Christmas, the union for child-protection caseworkers has warned.

The Public Service Association (PSA) has warned Community Services and Minister Pru Goward repeatedly that the new system was not ready for roll-out before its introduction in December.

Since its introduction, the PSA has been inundated with complaints from members that ChildStory is not up to handling the complex work they perform.

“This is more than your average records system,” says Troy Wright, Assistant General Secretary of the PSA. “It is a database of interactions with children and their families. Without it, child-protection caseworkers would be completely in the dark as to what is occurring for some of the most vulnerable members of our society.”

Concerns raised by PSA members include:

- Help Line response times have exploded as staff struggle to record reports of children at risk;
- Drop out rates of calls to the Help Line have increased with mandatory reporters such as police and medical practitioners unable to get through and make reports;
- Records of interactions of caseworkers with children and families being lost or not saved;
- Work cannot be referred to non-government organisations for follow-up;
- Risk assessments not working properly;
- Approvals for work being sent to managers who have left the Department or even died;
- An inability to secure sensitive matters;
- Referrals on old closed matters suddenly being reopened without a request;
- Inadequate, incomplete and incorrect training materials; and,
- Technical support swamped with up to 1000 emails requests for assistance per day, resulting in delays of more than 11 days in responding.

“Child protection caseworkers already perform a role which, in terms of stress, few of us can comprehend,” says Troy Wright. “We are now receiving regular reports the frustrations with this system are reducing already-overburdened caseworkers to tears.

“Even worse, we have grave concerns that reports regarding children at risk will be lost or unable to be recorded during the festive season, which is traditionally a demanding time upon the system.

“The responsibility for any tragedy that may eventuate as a result of the introduction of Child Story must lay squarely with the Minister’s office and not caseworkers in the field.”

Of further concern is the incapacity of ChildStory to process payments to service providers such as hotels where children are still residing, medical bills or other needs.

“Perhaps most galling has been the Department fobbing off these concerns before ChildStory was launched and blindly proceeding down this potentially disastrous path,” says Troy Wright. “Since its introduction, instead of listening to these faults and addressing them, the Department has been celebrating ChildStory as a success.”

“Some kids who already have the odds stacked against them are in for a shocking Christmas.”