

Helpline – PSA bans in place after FACS introduces timed toilet breaks

FACS engaged Limebridge consultants at great expense to review and make recommendations to improve Helpline processes.

FACS committed to consultation with the PSA including the report's findings and recommendations before any changes would be put in place.

Unfortunately, when Limebridge finalised its report, FACS failed to engage in genuine and meaningful consultation with the PSA as required by clause 65.1 of the *Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Award, 2009 – Consultation and Technological Change*

FACS has so far ignored our serious concerns about these changes which allow increased monitoring of caseworkers and micro-supervision by management, including timed toilet breaks.

It is completely unacceptable FACS is ignoring its work, health and safety obligations to staff and attempting to introduce call centre employment conditions more commonly found in call centres in developing countries. It beggars belief that FACS management considers it appropriate to introduce a practice which is fundamentally inhumane.

The PSA will not stand by and allow caseworkers who do very difficult and challenging work day in day out to be subjected to timed toilet breaks and other changes proposed by Limebridge which impact on their casework practice. We will also not stand by and have members directed to record the time spent on Aboriginal consultations under an administrative code. This is vital work required by legislation and the status quo is to remain in place.

The PSA directs members to implement the following bans at the Helpline:

1. Do not enter auxiliary codes to account for toilet and personal care breaks – referred to as BRB – “be right back”.
2. Members in supervisory roles are directed not to respond to auxiliary code alerts relating to BRB triggers and not to directly approach or engage in discussions with relevant caseworkers related to those triggers.
3. Do not seek approval for Aboriginal consultations under the Limebridge changes with the status quo to remain in place.
4. Do not allow calls to be observed until there has been meaningful consultation with the PSA and a policy framework and agreed standards to measure the quality of work in relation to call coaching.

What FACS should be doing is ensuring that the Helpline is properly funded and resourced. A good place to start would be converting the 45 caseworkers on temporary appointments to ongoing employment. Instead of spending large sums of money on external consultants who don't understand child protection, funds should be directed to ensuring the Helpline is staffed to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families. This is yet another case of the State Government getting it wrong by engaging private sector consultants instead of seeking the advice of the experts in the public sector – in this case highly experienced professionals dedicated to child protection.

We urge FACS to enter into genuine and meaningful consultation so that caseworkers can get on and do their jobs without being subjected to inhumane and intrusive changes in their workplace.

