



**Public Service Association of NSW**  
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In reply, please quote: SL:vv

17 January 2024

The Hon. Kate Washington, MP  
Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Inclusion  
52 Martin Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister *Kate*

Privatisation has failed the NSW Child Protection system. With simply too many children in need and not enough staff to care for them, the system is now in crisis and needs to change.

Out Of Home Care (OOHC) services in NSW were privatised by successive governments over the past 20 years, resulting in the quality of services plummeting and the costs to run them spiralling out of control. Too many children are in crisis, and the taxpayer is paying a premium for a substandard service. The evidence is in, the outsourcing experiment has demonstrably failed, and it is time the Government once again took responsibility for the most vulnerable children in our state.

In NSW, about 500 children are currently cared for under "Alternative Care Arrangements" (ACA) in temporary facilities such as serviced apartments and motels at enormous expense. These children make up about 2 to 3 per cent of kids in care, yet the Government has paid private providers a billion dollars over the past two years to care for them. In at least one case, an ACA cost NSW around \$3 million to provide support to one child in need.

A lot of large private providers, including Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are using a subcontract model to manage the provision of care to incredibly vulnerable children. There are examples of babies being looked after by labour-hire staff who often lack appropriate experience.

In some cases, private providers pick and choose who they take on, often refusing to accept responsibility for the most troubled children, even in circumstances where they have the capacity to place children in care. There is also, thanks to the way the system is set up, little financial incentive for these private providers to find foster homes for children. The NGO gets paid, no matter what the result.

The OOHC crisis is occurring against a background of Caseworker and other Child Protection staff burn out.

According to the Department's own figures, the vacancy rate for Caseworkers has increased by 250 per cent in the year to June 2023. Year-on-year, the Department is losing more Caseworkers than it is employing. Aboriginal staff are leaving at a higher rate, a crisis when their cultural knowledge is so vital to a community so heavily involved in the Child Protection system.

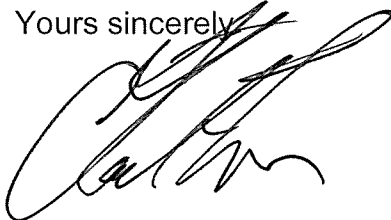
The result is a workforce of relatively inexperienced Caseworkers, with more than a quarter still in their first two years of employment with the Department. More disturbingly, a report found low staffing numbers are believed to be among of the reasons for some of the deaths of children known to Child Protection in 2022.

We need higher wages to attract and retain staff. The starting wage of a Caseworker is \$75,992. In comparison, the starting wage of staff doing similar work in Youth Justice is \$100,011. This is despite the fact Child Protection Caseworkers workers need tertiary qualifications, while Caseworkers in Youth Justice do not.

There is a risk, in my view, that Community Services becomes something akin to the fifth year of a Social Work degree; a stop before people just leave for a better-paid job elsewhere and the Department has to retrain yet another employee at yet more expense.

We are the wealthiest state in one of the world's wealthiest nations. The current situation cannot stand.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stewart Little', written over the typed name below.

**STEWART LITTLE  
GENERAL SECRETARY**