

Mr Tony Sievers MLA
Chair
Economic Policy Scrutiny Committee
Department of the Legislative Assembly

Via email: EPSC@nt.gov.au

Chief Executive Officer
Level 7, RCG Centre
47 Mitchell Street
Darwin NT 0800

Postal address
GPO Box 4621
Darwin NT 0801

Tel: 08 8999 8455

File Ref: TRIM
No.HCD2019/03191-002
Your Ref: COMM2017/00023.276

Dear Mr Sievers

Re: Department Of Local Government, Housing And Community Development Submission To The Inquiry On The Care And Protection Of Children Amendment Bill 2019

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the inquiry on the Care and Protection of Children Amendment Bill 2019 (the Bill). I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development (the Department).

I understand that the Bill has been developed to directly respond to 12 recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (the Royal Commission). The Bill seeks to underpin the Northern Territory Government's policy agenda and strategy for improving outcomes for vulnerable children, families and communities, as outlined within the Safe, Thriving and Connected, Generational Change for Children and Families 2018-28 Plan.

It is the view of the Department, that the Bill represents a significant step forward in the journey to reforming the Northern Territory child protection and youth justice systems and improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in the Northern Territory. The Bill is necessary to enable the implementation of reforms to child protection and youth justice in response to the Royal Commission, to strengthen accountability, streamline systems and processes and deliver greater consistency in operational practices that promote and uphold the wellbeing of children under care and custodianship within these systems.

It is also the view of the Department that the proposed amendments will contribute to a wide range of broader social policy reforms that are underway across the Northern Territory that seek to improve support to the most vulnerable Territorians in our community. Of particular relevance for the Department is the proposed strengthening of legislative provisions regarding transition planning and support for young people leaving care.

The proposed amendments place an increased level of obligation on the Chief Executive Officer, Territory Families, to actively support children leaving care to transition to independence. This can include a wide range of support to access entitlements, education, housing, employment, legal assistance and other health and community services, as well as financial assistance for the purposes of education or training and accommodation.

The Department acknowledges that moving out of home, or care, can be a vulnerable time for young people, particularly if they do not have a strong network of support as they transition into adulthood, or lack the support needed to access and sustain stable housing. The Royal Commission found that young people who have been in care are often more vulnerable and may be at a greater risk of homelessness than the broader youth population throughout this transition period.

As a fundamental enabler of health and wellbeing, having access to stable housing is critical to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. It is the Department's view that ensuring young people transitioning out of care are more effectively assisted to access stable housing and a range of other supports and services will contribute significantly to building their capacity to live independently and achieve long term housing independence.

The proposed amendments represent a positive step in the reform process for improving outcomes across child protection and youth justice. Passing the Bill will reinforce the Northern Territory Government's obligations towards effecting long term improvement in outcomes for vulnerable children, families and communities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry on the Care and Protection of Children Amendment Bill 2019.

Yours sincerely



Jamie Chalker APM
Chief/Executive Officer

12 April 2019