



# STATEMENT

25 October 2018

## Vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people: targeted measures required

AbSec, the NSW Aboriginal child and family peak organisation, is once again calling on the NSW Government to listen to Aboriginal people and communities, instead of making blanket changes to child protection legislation that will adversely impact Aboriginal children, young people and families in NSW.

Following the release of the *Shaping a Better Child Protection System* report on outcomes of consultations, and subsequent tabling of legislative changes without any further consultation and engagement, AbSec is concerned about the impact on Aboriginal children and young people, in particular the significant push for adoption as a solution to fix the crisis in the current system.

“We have consistently stated that adoption of Aboriginal children from the statutory system is not an option, and that the way forward is to listen to and meaningfully engage with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations to design a system that addresses the alarming overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care”, said Mr Tim Ireland, AbSec CEO.

“With more than 1 in 3 children removed from their family being Aboriginal children, these proposed changes will have a huge impact on our families and communities” said Mr Ireland. “And yet, the government has not adequately engaged with and genuinely listened to Aboriginal communities about the best interests of Aboriginal children and young people”.

AbSec remains deeply concerned about the government’s insistence on adoption as a blanket solution for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, repeating devastating past practices that have caused intergenerational trauma that continue to impact on Aboriginal communities today. Further, there is no evidence that shorter term orders for children entering care will mean better outcomes for their future, but raises critical questions about whether decisions will be made too quickly responding to unwarranted timeframes without adequately taking account of that child’s life and circumstances, without providing adequate active supports to strengthen families, and without properly safeguarding every child’s right to enduring connections, including cultural connections.

“A deeper look at how the system is operating is needed. We need greater safeguards and investment in prevention, early intervention and restoration, with proactive efforts to engage families and communities in the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children. Speeding up adoptions through artificially imposed timeframes will undermine rather than uphold the best interests of vulnerable children” Mr Ireland said.



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“Any change to adoption practice in NSW must respect the strong view of Aboriginal communities that the forced adoption of Aboriginal children through the statutory child protection system is not appropriate, and is not in the best interests of Aboriginal children and young people”.

AbSec is disappointed by the missed opportunity for more meaningful legislative change to improve the statutory child protection system and its capacity to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities, addressing the enduring over-representation of Aboriginal children across the statutory system. AbSec’s submission included a range of proposals to strengthen existing provisions regarding self-determination, participation, and the full recognition of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, as recommended by numerous reviews and inquiries, including the recent parliamentary inquiry into child protection.

“It’s clear that there is no plan to address the systemic inequities affecting Aboriginal children and families, and worse, Aboriginal communities who have the solutions are not being listened to” Mr Ireland said.

“Government must consult with Aboriginal people in greater detail, in the true spirit of partnership, to ensure that the legislative amendments will achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. These rushed, ideologically-driven amendments will harm, rather than safeguard, vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people, and should not proceed until adequate consultation has occurred.”

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