



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 14 March 2018

Statement in response to media comments made by David Gillespie MP

As the peak body for Aboriginal children and families in NSW, AbSec firmly rejects comments made yesterday by David Gillespie, Federal Assistant Minister for Children and Families.

Alongside implying an already debunked link conflating high rates of sexually transmitted infection among Aboriginal young people in the Northern Territory, and sexual abuse of Aboriginal children, Dr Gillespie also suggested that Aboriginal people are excusing the abuse of our own children “on cultural grounds”.

“We reject the absurd claim that Aboriginal people condone maltreatment on any grounds, least of all cultural grounds. Nothing could be further from the truth; we work hard every day to combat these issues and improve our kids’ lives,” said Tim Ireland, AbSec CEO.

“This sort of misleading commentary only seeks to further marginalise the voices of Aboriginal communities in tackling these important issues.

“It’s deplorable that Aboriginal parents, families and communities are yet again being forced to prove our own basic humanity in caring about our children. We cannot emphasise strongly enough that **we care for our kids and nothing is more important to us than their safety and wellbeing.**”

Further, the solution proposed by Dr Gillespie, the widespread adoption of Aboriginal children through the statutory system, is clearly no solution at all, as it does nothing to address the factors associated with risk, and indeed may introduce significant risks for the lifelong wellbeing of Aboriginal children. Adoption is not a new solution, warned Mr Ireland, but the same old solution of severing Aboriginal children from their family, community and culture, without any safeguards or accountability.

“When children are adopted, we lose critical safeguards to check in on them over time and ensure they’re safe and getting the connection to culture and community that they need for their long-term wellbeing,” Mr Ireland said.

“In NSW we have a stringent set of safeguards overseen by the Children’s Guardian to ensure children removed from their family are being properly cared for and adequately supported, so there’s public accountability. However, these safeguards are removed from so-called permanent care orders like adoption. That means children, carers and families don’t get the supports they need, and there’s no accountability for the long-term wellbeing of that child.”

Mr Ireland also rejected claims that valid concerns about adoption resulted in children remaining at risk.

“There is no validity to the argument that concerns about adoption of Aboriginal children are leaving kids in unsafe homes.

“We have a statutory child protection system in place to protect kids from abuse, and if the system is failing to intervene when necessary for any child, it should be held accountable. To suggest that it comes down to a choice between imposing adoption or leaving a child in an unsafe home is unhelpful and ill-informed.”

AbSec continues to oppose the adoption of Aboriginal children imposed by the statutory child protection system for a range of reasons. Importantly, we know that Aboriginal children are safest and most resilient when they are connected to their culture and community. Our priority is for Aboriginal children to be safe and grow strong, strengthened by family, community and culture.

“If governments are serious about reducing the incidence of harm experienced by Aboriginal children, they would be supporting Aboriginal communities to address the underlying causes: poverty, disadvantage and intergenerational trauma.

“As it stands, less than 20% of all child protection funding is directed to prevention, and even less to Aboriginal community-controlled approaches. The system continues to invest more in removing Aboriginal children and keeping them apart from their family, community and culture, and not Aboriginal-led family and community strengthening approaches. That needs to change.

“The safety, welfare and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, and how we minimise and respond to harm is a serious conversation” Mr Ireland concluded. “Finding solutions requires constructive, facts-based dialogue that upholds the rights of Aboriginal children.”

Tim Ireland is available for interview opportunities.

**Please direct all media enquiries to
Alyssa Robinson on (02) 9559 5299 or Alyssa.Robinson@absec.org.au.**