

STATEMENT

For more information contact:

p...(08) 8999 6076 | e... occ@nt.gov.au

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The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) acknowledges the release of the Report of the Independent Review into the Conduct of the Department of Children and Families (the Review).

From the outset, the OCC pays our deepest respect to Kumanjayi Little Baby, her family and community.

As the independent oversight body for the Northern Territory's child protection system, the OCC takes the findings and recommendations of the Review seriously.

The OCC has consistently identified the need for transformational change across the Territory's child protection system. While the limited scope of the Review provides an examination of the circumstances of one case, many of the systemic issues the Review identifies have been recognised for some time. For example, the OCC, alongside other experts and stakeholders, has long advocated for stronger early intervention and prevention responses and greater support for families. This is clearly on the public record. The findings reinforce the need to address longstanding issues that have been identified across the child protection system and ensure meaningful improvements are realised in practice.

Any systemic reform will only be effective and sustainable if it is undertaken in genuine partnership with Aboriginal leaders, communities and organisations. The OCC acknowledges the unwavering leadership of Aboriginal people and community-controlled organisations in efforts to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Significant reforms to child protection systems require clear operational guidance, appropriate resourcing, workforce capability and effective oversight. Experience demonstrates that the success of reform is ultimately determined through implementation. This highlights the importance of careful planning, robust governance arrangements and ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess whether changes are operating as intended and improving outcomes for children and families.

Child protection does not operate in isolation. Efforts to improve outcomes for children and families must be supported by effective responses across housing, domestic and family violence, health, education and community services.

The OCC acknowledges the Government's acceptance of the Review's recommendations. The focus must now turn to implementation, with clear accountability, adequate resourcing and transparent public reporting on progress. Reform that is not properly planned, funded or implemented risks placing further pressure on a system that is already experiencing significant challenges and not achieving intended outcomes.

We must keep in focus whether children and young people will experience the lived reality of these changes, and whether they will indeed result in improved safety and outcomes.



Protecting the best interests of Territory children

📞 08 8999 6076 📧 Level 4, NT House, 22 Mitchell Street, Darwin NT
@occ@nt.gov.au 🌐 occ.nt.gov.au

Consistent with the Children's Commissioner's statutory functions, the OCC is committed to monitoring the implementation and operation of recommendations arising from the Review and to reporting publicly on their impact in practice.

Finally, the OCC observes that it is listed as having been consulted during the Review process. While the OCC was briefed on the terms of reference and scope of the Review, staff did not participate in a formal consultation or interview as part of the process.

ENDS

