



21 October 2015

Ms Margaret Quirk MLA  
Chairperson  
Community Development and Justice Standing Committee  
Parliament House  
GPO Box A11  
PERTH WA 6837

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Dear Ms Quirk

**RE: Request for Committee to continue Agency Review into the Department of Child Protection and Family Support with a focus on Resource Allocation**

In March 2014, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee held a public hearing to discuss the issue of “early identification of children at risk”, as a part of an Agency Review into the Department of Child Protection and Family Support. The review’s proceeding status is ‘active’.

Through continual feedback from our members, the CPSU/CSA has developed serious concerns about excessive workload and its detrimental effect on the Department’s ability to identify children at risk early (before abuse or neglect occurs or continues). The excessive workload experienced by our members is a manifestation of the inadequacy of current funding to the Department, which does not allow for the allocation of sufficient resources to meet increasing need for child protection and family support services in WA.

The CPSU/CSA requests that the Committee continue its investigation into factors that impact the early identification of children at risk, with a focus on the significant impact that inadequate funding has on various areas of the Department. The inadequacy of this funding results in both excessive workloads for staff and bodies of work which cannot be allocated, which in turn limits the Department’s capacity to identify children at risk early. The placement of children on the Department’s “Monitored List” is an example of this problem.

Workload Concerns

The CSA represents over 1500 members at the Department of Child Protection and Family Support, in roles including Child Protection Officers, Family Resource Employees,

Family and Domestic Violence Officers, Social Workers and Psychologists, as well as administrative and corporate positions.

For many years the CPSU/CSA has been attempting to work with the Department to address the on-going issue of excessive workload for our case workers. In 2007, the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission (WAIRC) issued Orders to the Department to implement a Strategy for Caseload Management (SCLM) that allowed for:

- A maximum of 15 cases to be allocated per full time case worker, with the capacity to increase the cap to 18 cases in exceptional situations, which must be justified in writing.
- The use of a workload management tool which measures the intensity and complexity of work to inform the appropriate allocation of cases.
- Excess cases to be pushed up-the-line to a Team Leader, who may refer them to the District Director (who then becomes the Nominated Liaison Officer) after 2 weeks.

The SCLM provides a method to manage the workload of case workers to ensure they were able to:

- Dedicate sufficient time and consideration to each case brought to their attention; and
- Work safely with a manageable workload.

The implementation of the SCLM and an accompanying significant injection of funding into the Department initially alleviated workload concerns. However, as years have passed, staffing levels have not kept pace with the number of cases being received by the Department's district offices because of inadequacies in the "demand model" of resource allocation. This has been felt by CPSU/CSA members, who are again reporting unsustainable workloads despite the current Order. It has also resulted in a consistently high number of cases are being placed on the Monitored List because all case workers are at full capacity. The CPSU/CSA has serious concerns regarding the Monitored List, as it substantially hampers the Department's ability to identify children at risk early.

### The Monitored List

In August 2015 there were 642 cases on the Monitored List. The list consists of children who have an open case with the Department but do not have an allocated case worker and, consequently, have no active investigation or inquiry taking place into their circumstances. A disproportionate amount of children who have interaction with the Department are Indigenous, meaning it is likely that a significant number of these children without a case worker are likely to be Indigenous.

Under the joint CPSU/CSA and Department of Child Protection and Family Support Workload Management Guidelines, which were formed to ensure the Workload Order by the WAIRC was followed, the cases on the Monitored List:

*“[Are] not allocated to a worker. It is initially queued to the Team Leader then after a fortnight to the District Director. The Team Leader is now the ‘NLO’ and then the District Director.*

*The important aspects of queuing cases are:*

- *Queued work will have a reallocation and task plan.*
- *Queued work is not case managed.*
- *All action relating to queued work is reactive.*
- *Queued work will be reviewed.*
- *Only minor tasks can be completed without reallocation.*
- *Reallocation should occur as part of the fortnightly planning cycle. “*

The issue of workload and the allocation of children to the Monitored List results from a lack of case-worker staff. These 642 children are waiting for someone to engage with their case, as staff already working at peak capacity.

Children on the Monitored List are missing out on family support and other interventions including home visits. Until their case is allocated, these vulnerable children may not receive the attention necessary to identify early if they are at risk and require the active intervention of the Department in their lives.

The Monitored List is a symptom of excessive workload experienced by our members, which is caused by a resource allocation which does not ensure that every child with an open child protection case has a caseworker actively assessing or, if necessary, intervening into their situation. This severely affects the department’s ability to identify risk early. The CPSU/CSA has grave concerns for the wellbeing of children on the Monitored List, as these children are not having active management of their case for a period of at least two weeks. Unless a child on the list is able to self-advocate, or has someone in their lives who will raise fresh concerns about their welfare, it is unlikely risks will be identified and appropriate action taken while there is no active management of their case. A case-worker assigned to every child brought to the Department’s attention would mean that these vulnerable children have at least one person taking an active interest in their safety and wellbeing.

### Lack of Resourcing

A lack of adequate resourcing of the Department means that:

1. Staffing numbers are not sufficiently increasing to meet the need for child protection and family support services in WA.
2. There are children known to the Department who are not having their cases investigated and assessed in a timely manner, hampering the early identification of children at risk.
3. Some case work staff are dealing with workloads in excess of those outlined in the SCLM, limiting their capacity to dedicate adequate attention to all of their allocated cases and hindering the early identification of risk.

It should be noted existing resourcing inadequacies will logically be exacerbated by the "Workforce Renewal Policy" which, despite not affecting child protection workers to the same degree as others within the public sector, will reduce the support provided to case work by other occupational groups.

The CPSU/CSA urges the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee to examine how resource allocation to the Department is causing excessive workload and the existence of a significant Monitored List. A model of resource allocation needs to be identified and implemented to ensure every vulnerable child has a case-worker allocated to them.

It should be noted that the CPSU/CSA's concerns around inadequate resource allocation and its impact on identifying children at risk early are not limited to case work, but rather the Department more broadly. Other specific areas of concern include:

- Working with Children checks
- Preventative services for families

The CPSU/CSA requests the Committee focus on the Monitored List as symptomatic of inadequate resource allocation. However, if the Committee deems it appropriate for a broader examination to be undertaken, we would welcome the opportunity to provide more information.

Our members in the Department of Child Protection and Family Support care deeply about the welfare of children in this state. They need to be resourced properly to ensure that every child brought to the Department's attention doesn't have to wait for someone to care.

Yours sincerely



Rikki Hendon  
Branch Assistant Secretary