



**Hon Andrea Mitchell MLA**  
**Minister for Mental Health; Child Protection**

Our ref: 55-01613  
Your ref: Petition No. 132

Hon. Simon O' Brien MLC  
Chairman  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Chairman

Thank you for your correspondence dated 13 October 2016 regarding Petition No. 132 – Oppose funding cuts to the Department of Child Protection and Family Support.

The State Government is committed to providing services to protect and support children, families and individuals at risk of harm or in crisis. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) is integral in the provision of these services.

Since 2008-09, the Department's budget has increased to \$640.2 million (88 per cent) in 2016-17, with 9 per cent increase in the overall number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and 21 per cent in new caseworker positions since the Barnett Government came to power.

In response to the increasing demand for child protection services, the Department has been allocated additional resources through its cost and demand model. This model has been developed with the Department of Treasury (Treasury) and allocates additional funding to enable the Department to adequately maintain core service delivery functions in light of additional growth in demand for its services. The model is updated on an annual basis to reflect the current cost and demand driver projections. Any required adjustments to the Department's funding needs are completed during the next budget process.

Since the introduction of the demand model, the average caseload per caseworker has constantly remained around 12 cases per caseworker. This average is well within the bounds of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission Order - 2007 WAIRC 01304 maximum of 15 cases per caseworker. As noted in the petition, in exceptional circumstances caseworkers can manage up to 18 cases, with approximately 2.25 per cent of caseworkers currently managing more than 15 cases.

The additional resources have also seen a drop in the number of monitored cases from 1,222 in November 2008 to 655 in September 2016. Although the Department endeavours to minimise the number of monitored cases, it is not practical to resource the Department to enable every child to have a direct caseworker all the time. As a result, the Department has workload management strategies and monitoring to ensure children and concerns for children are adequately responded to and monitored in a timely but prioritised manner. The monitored list is reviewed and reprioritised on a regular basis to minimise any risk to children and ensure caseworkers have a reasonable caseload.



Although additional resources have been provided to address demand, I have also requested that the Department review its expenditure and processes to identify efficiencies to achieve prescribed savings measures. The impact of these measures on the Department is always considered prior to their application and in instances where frontline service delivery will be affected such as the Agency Expenditure Review savings measure, the Department has been given an exemption. As noted previously, the average caseload per caseworker has remained constant and within the 15 cases cap, following the introduction of these savings measures.

The Department is also actively targeting a reduction in the demand for its services by striving to work earlier with vulnerable families to provide direct support and divert them away from the child protection system by directing them to relevant family support services. I recently launched the *Building Safe and Strong Families – Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy* which outlines how services will be realigned to more effectively divert at-risk families from the child protection system and safely reduce the number of children entering care. This realignment of early intervention services includes the refocus of the Responsible Parenting Service (RPS) program to capture the effective preventive elements and improve its targeting to the most at-risk families. The successful aspects of RPS noted in the petition will continue and have not been 'cut' as the petition outlined. I have attached a copy of the *Building Safe and Strong Families – Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy* for your information.

In regards to privatising departmental services, the Department has a long standing, constructive and effective partnership with the community sector. The Government will always consider service delivery through the community sector when it has been proven to be effective and efficient to do so. That said, I am not aware of any plans to transfer services delivered by the Department to the community sector and planned increases in investment in the community sector is on the basis of existing contracted services. The Department's community sector expenditure has remained at around 30 per cent of its budget for the last four years and it is anticipated to remain at a similar percentage in the forward estimates.

The Director General of the Department will be attending the planned hearing scheduled on 16 November 2016 and can further address the issues raised in the petition.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide my comments on the petition.

Yours sincerely



**HON ANDREA MITCHELL MLA  
MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION**

- 7 NOV 2016