BACKFLIP DOESN’T GO FAR ENOUGH

The announcement today of a Board of Inquiry into the Territory's Child Protection system is a significant back-flip that raises further questions about the competency of Minister Malamdirri McCarthy.

Shadow Child Protection Minister Jodeen Carney said while it was welcomed that the Government had broadened the nature and scope of the inquiry, it was troubling Ms McCarthy had originally attempted to fob off the significant failings within the child protection system.

“The Minister has back-flipped,” Ms Carney said.

“Last month, she said she would seek a report on ‘recent issues raised about child protection’ (media release, October 28th).

“Today, following considerable pressure from the Opposition and organisations such as Bravehearts and the AMA, she has announced an inquiry that will ‘review the child protection system’.

“We remain concerned about the Minister’s handling of this important portfolio – her incompetence has been staggering.”

“It’s indicative of how poorly this Government has carried out its child protection responsibilities that its inquiry will consider what should be day-to-day issues such as ‘the functioning of the child protection system...’ and ‘specific approaches to address the needs of Territory children in the child protection system’.”

Ms Carney said it was a surprise the terms of reference did not include any mention of resourcing within the child protection system.

“The Minister had no idea when quizzed by media on the number of child protection workers within the Territory system and it took a week for her Department to release details of the number of workers,” Ms Carney said.

“Resourcing is a key component of any effective child protection system – a point that seems to have evaded the Minister.
“While we’re pleased to see the Minister’s picked up some of our proposed terms of reference and has broadened the inquiry, the Government should have gone further. It’s disappointing Labor thinks half an inquiry is better than a fully independent inquiry.

“In Government, the Country Liberals will commence a comprehensive, fully independent inquiry making use of appropriately qualified experts and we will ensure the Territory’s child protection system meets community expectations.”

Ms Carney said she did not want a repeat of the last major inquiry initiated by this Government.

“It took the Labor Government two months to respond to the recommendations contained in The Little Children are Sacred Report.

“Given the problems within the child protection system that have been highlighted since I raised in Parliament the issue of the baby who suffered brain damage after being released into the care of family members contrary to the advice of child protection workers, it is essential the Board of Inquiry report is released – and its recommendations acted on – in a timely manner.”

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