Jodeen Carney  
Shadow Minister for Child Protection  

Media Release  

10th February 2010  

A POLICY TO PROTECT CHILDREN  

The Territory Opposition has released a policy to address the culture of cover-up that plagues the child protection system in the Northern Territory.  

“The current system is failing vulnerable children too often and in need of immediate reform to address the culture of cover-up that is placing children at unnecessary risk of harm,” says Jodeen Carney, Shadow Minister for Child Protection.  

“The reform of the child protection system under this policy begins at the top with the creation of a separate Department of Child Protection and the appointment of a Minister for Children whose portfolios will relate solely to children's matters.  

“This measure is designed to end the buck passing and confusion that surrounds the chain of responsibility for child protection in the Territory - responsibility will now reside with the Minister for Children. The responsibility for children taken into care will also return to the Minister.  

“The Country Liberal’s policy will also increase the powers and the responsibility of the Children’s Commissioner.  

“Currently the Children’s Commissioner can only investigate complaints relating to a narrowly defined group of children and has no power to initiate ‘own motion’ investigations.  

“The situation regarding child protection in the Territory is so dire that we believe the Children’s Commissioner must be given powers akin to the Ombudsman.  

“Without properly resourced, legally empowered and ongoing investigations by the Children’s Commissioner too many children will continue to be abused and neglected.  

“The Country Liberals policy will also create special whistleblowers protection for workers in the child protection system.  

“There has been a repeated failure to act on serious concerns raised by workers within the child protection system.
“The recently case of a motherless infant being placed in inappropriate circumstances despite repeated warnings from social workers at the Royal Darwin Hospital illustrates the need for greater whistle blower protection for workers.

“That case would have been ignored and a subsequent investigation into the systemic failings of intake procedures in child protection never undertaken without the courage of individual workers informing the media.

“For their trouble those workers were threatened with legal action by the Minister and remain in danger of persecution by this Government.

“The reforms of the Country Liberals will end this disgraceful situation.”

There will be an immediate injection of $9 million to fund these policy initiatives.

Further comment: Jodeen Carney 0407 187 992