COUNTRY LIBERALS

MEDIA RELEASE

BULLYING CLAIMS MUST BE INVESTIGATED

Robyn Lambley

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The Henderson Government must initiate an urgent, independent investigation into allegations of bullying and intimidation of hospital social workers by Health Department administrators.

Shadow Child Protection Minister, Robyn Lambley, said the bullying claims point to a culture within Family and Children’s Services which places the reputations of the Department and the careers of its senior managers above the safety and welfare of children in need.

“The inquiry should look at the circumstances surrounding the claims made by former hospital social worker Susan Mansfield and by Ombudsman Carolyn Richards on tonight’s 4 Corners program,” Mrs Lambley said.

“Ms Mansfield was stood-over and intimidated by a senior Departmental Officer after she reported systemic failings within the Territory’s child protection system to Children’s Commissioner Howard Bath.

“Ms Mansfield’s report to Professor Bath related to the placement of a baby to a family member who was already being investigated by FACS.

“The baby was placed in care after his mother’s death despite warnings to FACS from hospital social workers of serious concerns about the carer’s capacity to adequately protect the child.

“The child was subsequently re-admitted to hospital with shocking head injuries and is now blind and has permanent brain damage.

“Also of deep concern was the assertion by Carolyn Richards that staff were actively being subjected to reprisals by superiors.

“I understand a number of social workers have left Royal Darwin Hospital in recent months because of concerns they held about the priorities of senior Health administrators.

“The Health Minister must treat Susan Mansfield and Carolyn Richards’ comments with the utmost gravity and move to ensure similar incidents of intimidation are not allowed to occur again.

“Staff should be free to express their concerns about child welfare matters to authorities without being made to feel they are doing something wrong otherwise the best interests of children in care are compromised.

“While Carolyn Richards is currently conducting her own investigation into failures within the Territory’s child protection system, the Government must initiate an independent probe into the bullying claims with a view to initiating disciplinary action or laying criminal charges if
The Chief Minister's response to questioning on 4 Corners was weak and indecisive and held out little hope that there would not be a repeat of the tragic cases outlined on the program.

The death by blood poisoning of Deborah Melville in Palmerston and the starvation death of a 7-week old baby boy in South Australia while under the care of FACS must never be allowed to happen again.

The Growing them strong, together report is the third substantial investigation into child protection services in the Territory in recent years – and each time promises of change by the Government have not been matched by action.

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