November 28th, 2012

The Country Liberals Government will re-write the Care and Protection of Children Act to reflect the changing face of child protection across the Territory in the post Board of Inquiry era.

Announcing the proposed amendments in Parliament tonight Children and Families Minister, Robyn Lambley said the 147 recommendations contained in the Board’s Growing Them Strong, Together report had provided a platform for on-going reform of the child protection system.

She said she wanted the Act to better reflect contemporary approaches to child protection, with distinctions between short and long term orders, provisions for unborn children and mediation.

Mrs Lambley said she wanted the new Act to be simpler and more efficient, including:

- Mediation provisions allowing for earlier resolution of child protection matters
- Fewer matters going to court
- Shorter hearings for those cases that mediation does not resolve
- Therapeutic orders to enable admission to secure care facilities
- Permanent care – special guardianship – orders
- Provisions enabling information sharing, receipt of notifications and investigations for unborn children.

“The re-worked Act should also include a new system of protection orders with a distinction between short term orders targeting reunification and long term orders providing stability for children while maintaining a connection to family,” Mrs Lambley said.

“This process of reform will provide an opportunity for us to lay the groundwork for a modern child protection system that delivers better outcomes for children and families.”

Mrs Lambley said the Government was committed to improving the out-of-home care system next year, including delivering strategies to increase the foster care pool and carer retention rates.

“I want to maintain a strong commitment to frontline supervision, learning and development,” she said.

“The Government is also committed to keeping Aboriginal children safe in their communities through the establishment of an Aboriginal Child Safety and Wellbeing Framework.”

Mrs Lambley attacked the Labor Government for failing to fund key Board of Inquiry commitments, and said the Country Liberals will approach child protection differently to the previous administration.

“This Government is not defined by a single report, and our approach will be based on the needs of children and families, particularly those living in remote parts of the Northern Territory,” she said.