Child Protection Policy Shift Places Kids at Risk

The Territory Government has shifted away from a policy of investigation of reports of child abuse placing children at risk, following in line with the other Labor States, according to Shadow Health Minister Dr Lim.

"The trend is reflected in increases in reports of child harm but decreasing numbers of children are being admitted into care," Dr Lim said today.

"The trend in this and other jurisdictions is toward a child care philosophy of selective intervention rather than investigation. What that means is that when reports of child harm are made to the department the kids are left in place because the department doesn't want to upset the family unit. This means the department’s focus is shifted from protecting the child to developing rapport with the abuser.

"Last financial year 29% of ‘children in danger’, the highest category of risk, were not investigated within the required 24 hour time frame demanded by Government policy. The second highest category ‘child at risk’ requires the matter be investigated within 72 hours. Unbelievably 63% of those investigations were not carried out in the expected time frame.

"Last year the Minister told parliament that they would not investigate sexual activity in children over the age of 14 years if the children were consenting to the sexual activity. The Government has deliberately contravened its own laws on the Age of Consent, which is set at 16 years.

"The Government has broken its own laws so that it can meet its own budget projections without any consideration for child safety. The problem is that without investigation of reported cases there will be even less protection for children at risk.

"Lower benchmarks do not protect children. Policy frameworks that break established laws and move away from investigation of possible crimes against children will do nothing to protect children. Approaches that try to make offenders the focus of Government's response to abuse forgets the most important fact, the offender is never more important than the child.

"The Government must continue to investigate reports of abuse and where appropriate prosecute offenders and protect children from violence. That should be the only focus of the Government's response. Anything else is a travesty.”

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