TRAGIC DEATH NEEDS FULL INVESTIGATION

Terry Mills, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, is calling on the Minister for Family and Community Services, Delia Lawrie, to initiate an independent inquiry into FACS handling of the tragic death of the young girl in foster care last week.

“News that the Minister wasn’t informed of the death until yesterday confirms the need for an independent investigation of the circumstances surrounding the girl’s death,” says Mr Mills.

“The publicly known facts warrant an independent investigation of FACS handling of the situation, including an assessment of whether the Department is adequately resourced to handle its case load.

“An internal investigation simply won’t do in such serious circumstances.

“There have been worrying signs that the Department of Family and Community Services has been buckling under the pressure of its workload for sometime now.

“When a young girl, in care, was allegedly raped in February, the Minister dismissed calls for an independent inquiry into the resourcing of FACS.

“The Minister’s later decision to downgrade official response times to initiate investigations into children at risk of abuse suggested FACS wasn’t coping with its workload. *

“The subsequent revelation that the Department was failing to achieve even the downgraded response times, highlighted how dire the situation had become.*

“An independent investigation of FACS handling of the situation would complement, not cut across, the current police investigation which will focus on the issue of criminal neglect.

“FACS is entrusted with caring for the most vulnerable children in our community. It must do so to the highest standards possible.”

*The May Budget estimated a 100% compliance rate for commencing investigations within timeframe for a ‘Child in Danger’, an 80% rate for a ‘Child at Risk’ and a 70% rate for a ‘Child of Concern’. The previous target was 100% in all 3 categories.

*The Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Child Sex Abuse showed that in 2005/06 investigations for ‘Children in Danger’ were commenced within timeframe just 70% of the time and a mere 30% of the time for both the ‘Child at Risk’ and ‘Child of Concern’ categories.

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