MEDIA RELEASE

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Association of Children's Welfare Agencies calls for collaborative response to Out-of-Home Care System Review

CEO of the Association for Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA), Maree Walk, said the community services sector welcomed today's release of a report on its review of the NSW Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) system, commissioned in May by Minister Washington.

"The community services sector always welcomes discussion and insight on how we can better serve the children and families we support," Ms Walk said. "Everyone wants these children to thrive and reach their potential."

Ms Walk agreed the system needs improving. "NGOs have been consistently open with Government, sharing information on changes and improvements the broader system needs such as streamlining of burdensome and duplicative administrative processes, greater flexibility in how care is provided and effective capture of child outcome data," Ms Walk said.

"We welcome more consistent governance and accountability, and stronger partnering with the Government in the care of the state's most vulnerable children"

In Ms Walk's view, "It is critical for the Department to work with out-of-home care providers to better track service quality and outcomes achieved for children and young people in care, especially in relation to health and school engagement."

The report also puts a spotlight on elevating the voice of carers and tackling the issues that are causing carers distress. Ms Walk said, "Carers are a precious community resource, and we need to do much better in supporting them. We have long advocated for an increase in the carer allowance, support for peer networks, access to training and a systemic way of responding to carer concerns."

ACWA endorses the recommendation for dual investment in out-of-home care, early intervention and preservation while the system shifts towards supporting families earlier to keep children out of care. However, she noted that, "I would caution against implementing the recommendation to bring all children on interim care orders under the case management of the department."

Ms Walk said, "Before making changes, we need to look at the evidence on what works in safely restoring children on interim orders before dismantling a core element of the current OOHC system. Also, we must ensure that any significant reform aligns with the Government's commitment to transition Aboriginal children to the care of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as quickly as possible."

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Ms Walk said “This review shows that Minister Washington is determined to address critical issues in the system and is prepared undertake significant reform. However, ACWA urges the NSW Government to recognise that “the system works best for children and young people when there is integration and collaboration between the Government and Non-Government sectors. That’s when children and families get the best services.”

The Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies is the NSW peak body representing non-government organisations that provide services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

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