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TRAGIC DEATHS MUST RESULT IN CHANGE

Today's coronial findings into the deaths of 12-year-old Deborah Melville and 7-week old Kalib Peter Johnston must give Government the impetus for a root and branch overhaul of the child protection system.

“These terrible, senseless deaths should have been the catalyst for substantial and significant change in the management and operation of child protection in the Territory,” said Opposition Leader Terry Mills.

“It is disturbing that almost 5 years after Kalib starved to death and 3 years after Deborah died of blood poisoning through neglect, significant areas of systemic Government failure have been identified by the coroner.”

Mr Mills said while the Government has made some changes to child protection in the Territory, it is appalling that it wasn’t until late last year that it announced a comprehensive review of a system repeatedly described by the Coroner as chaotic and dysfunctional.

“This only came after the Opposition revealed details of an infant who suffered permanent brain damage after being placed in the care of a family member.

“The Government has breached its duty of care to children in child protection and to the people who have struggled to work within a system that was clearly under-resourced and stretched to the limit.

“The fact that Deborah Melville had 5 different case-workers over a 30 month period indicates a lack of continuity that is unacceptable in an area as important as child welfare.

“The lack of co-ordination between the police and FACS let down Kalib Johnston and it is concerning neither agency has formally signed the MOU designed to ensure closer co-operation.”

Mr Mills said the Henderson Government must have known about the appalling state of agencies within FACS, and instead chose to stay silent about the problems rather than act to end the failures.

“The concerns expressed by workers who spoke with the coroner must have been passed up to Ministerial level, but nothing significant was done to improve the situation," he said.

“This is another case of Government ministers ignoring the concerns of its employees and hoping the problems would be sorted without them becoming public. It perpetuates a culture of cover-up.

“Instead of instituting real change, the Government shuffled various ministers through the portfolio. With that failure of continuity at the top, it's little wonder the system was falling apart at the bottom.”

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594