Terry Mills  
Leader of the Opposition

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MINISTERIAL MERRY-GO-ROUND FAILS VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The high turnover of Ministers responsible for child protection has been a significant factor in the failure of Territory Labor to deliver an acceptable level of care for children at risk of harm.

“Yesterday's Coroner’s reports lays bare the chaos and confusion that the over stretched child protection staff work within,” says Terry Mills, Leader of the Opposition.

Motter helpfully detailed some of the issues that contributed to the office ‘imploding’. She described an office where staff were ‘running from one thing to another’ and not having lunchbreaks. She said the phones were ‘going crazy’ and at the same time people were in the administrative area waiting to see staff. (Coroner’s Inquest p 11)

“It is particularly telling that the Coroner identified the revolving door of caseworkers as contributing to the systemic failure of child protection in the Northern Territory,” says Terry Mills.

Motter explained that it was difficult to keep staff. She described a ‘revolving door’ of caseworkers, which led to a lack of consistency both for carers and the children in care. Seah-Quenoy and Jackson also commented on the problems associated with high staff turnover. In the critical period from January 2005 to July 2007, the children had five different caseworkers (Coroner’s Inquest p12)

“The fact that 4 different Ministers have had responsibility for child protection since the death of the young girl highlights that the confusion in the child protection offices is mirrored in the ministerial offices,” says Terry Mills.

“The merry-go-round of Ministers for child protection has undermined the development and implementation of effective policies and makes a mockery of the principle of ministerial responsibility.

“The Coroner has also echoed the Opposition views in recommending that the Children’s Commissioner needs enhanced powers to effectively do the job.

“At the November sittings of Parliament the Shadow Minister for Child Protection introduced a Bill to broaden the power of the Children’s Commissioner to allow for ‘own motion’ investigations on all children – whether they are ‘protected’ or not.

“I hope the Henderson Government is honest enough to admit its profound failings in child protection and adopt the sensible amendments advocated by both the Coroner and the Opposition.”

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