



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc.

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MEDIA RELEASE

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The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle puts children's safety first

“The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle – a policy to protect Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children’s connections to their family and culture – should not be blamed for the failures of child protection systems to keep children safe in foster care,” Steve Larkins, Chairperson of SNAICC, said today.

“An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child’s involvement with their family and community is highly important, *but never more important than their safety* – the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is very clear about this. It is wrong to blame the Principle for poor decision making by under-resourced and poorly trained child protection departments in the Northern Territory or elsewhere,” said Mr Larkins, Chairperson of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, the country’s peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

“Recent criticisms in the media of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, particularly concerning child protection failures in the Northern Territory, are misinformed because they fail to acknowledge that the principle never condones making an unsafe foster placement for a child,” Mr Larkins said.

“Maintaining connections to family and community is not a justification for leaving a child at risk of harm or making a placement that puts them at risk of harm and well-trained child protection staff should know this.”

“It has been poor decision making by an under-resourced and poorly trained Northern Territory child protection department that compromises children’s safety through poor placement planning and support – not the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle,” Mr Larkins said.

“We have seen numerous reports and inquiries into the child protection system in the Northern Territory and we know what is needed to protect children – they have all called for better resources and training for child protection workers and the department there.”

Mr Larkins continued, “Even allowing that the complexities of many communities makes the job of protection children’s safety very difficult, more can be done and done better. SNAICC advocates for greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in designing and managing – and being responsible for – the child protections systems that are developed in their communities.”

“Aboriginal community-controlled child welfare agencies successfully provide safe and culturally strong foster care across the country. From our perspective, foster placements within the Aboriginal community are the most stable and successful, provided these are carefully chosen and well resourced and supported,” Mr Larkins said.

“The National Child Protection Framework recently endorsed by COAG identified strengthening compliance with the Aboriginal Child Protection System in all jurisdictions as a priority. Governments must step up and put resources behind this priority so that child protection departments are well resourced to implement the principle properly and safeguard children’s safety and wellbeing in foster care,” Mr Larkins said.

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